***The Gospel Gets Closer***

**Summer 2022, Acts 16:6-15 July 24, 2022**

***The Lord opened [Lydia’s] heart to respond to Paul’s message.  
When she and the members of her family were baptized,   
she invited [Paul and his companions] into her home.*Acts 16:14-15**

**Scene #1: Luke joins Paul and Silas in the missionary band**

*6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

Acts 16:6-10

1. The gospel has now arrived in Europe, what Isaiah calls “the islands” (see Isaiah 42)

2. The Holy Spirit worked first by closing, and then by opening (Paul finally did get to Ephesus!)

**Scene #2: Lydia is a very persuasive convert**

*11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.*

*13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.*

Acts 16

1. Philippi represents the history of the “islands”

2. With no synagogue in Philippi, Paul and his companions start where God-fearers gather

3. Lydia is a picture of conversion: gospel, conviction, faith, baptism, fellowship

**Theological key to the text: What does is mean when the Holy Spirit is at work?**

*18 Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. 19 While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the Lord’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.*

Ezekiel 10

17 *“ ‘In the last days, God says,*

*I will pour out my Spirit on all people . . . .*

Acts 2

1. The “end” of the Old Testament is when \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. The “sign” of the New Testament is when \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. We believe the Holy Spirit still closes doors and open hearts

**Lessons from Lydia**

1) Paul never forgets Lydia’s invitation to “abide”

*21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.*

*27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel . . . .*

Philippians 1

2) This is the first place Paul’s baptizing is recorded, for these two reasons: 1) to show that Lydia is   
 included in the body, and 2) to take the attention away from Paul and put it on Jesus

*13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14 I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. 16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

1 Corinthians 1

**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has fewer sermons on Acts available than I would hope at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r\_ac.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_ac.htm) *.* His sermon on Acts 16:9 is at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0189.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0189.htm)

Tim Keller has said much on the topic of mission. See “5 Practices” at [*https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/*](https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/)and [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/)

Kim Riddlebarger has an interesting article on Acts 15 at [*https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/three-take-aways-from-the-jerusalem-council-acts-15*](https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/three-take-aways-from-the-jerusalem-council-acts-15)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermons on this text are at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10*](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10) and [*https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40*](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40)

John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984). For this passage, I also like Kistemaker’s commentary (Baker Book House, 1990).

Harry Boer, *That My House May Be Filled* (Eerdmans, 1957)

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# 5 Practices of a Missional Church

### Tim Keller at [*https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/*](https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/)

In the West, for nearly a thousand years, the relationship of European Christian churches to the broader culture was a relationship known as Christendom. The institutions of society “Christianized” people and stigmatized non-Christian belief and behavior.

British missionary, Lesslie Newbigin, went to India [in 1936]. When he returned to England, some thirty years later, he discovered that the Western church now found itself in a non-Christian society, but it had not adapted to its new situation. While most traditional evangelical churches can win the temperamentally conventional and conservative to Christ, American author Michael Wolff notes that this market is shrinking. If evangelical churches settle the decline in numbers, with the remaining Christian body not becoming missional, they will decline and die. This has instituted an even greater need for “missional” churches, which adopt the following practices:

**1. Speak in the vernacular**

In Christendom, technical biblical terms are well known inside and outside of the church. In a missional church, however, these terms must be explained.

The missional church:

* avoids “tribal” language, stylized prayer language, and evangelical jargon that seeks to set a spiritual tone.
* avoids “we-they” language, disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs
* avoids sentimental, pompous, “inspirational” talk
* avoids talking as if non-believers were not present

**2. Enter and retell the culture’s stories with the Gospel**

In Christendom, it is possible to simply exhort Christianized people to do what they know they should. There is little or no real engagement, listening, or persuasion. Often, along with exhortation, there is a heavy reliance on guilt to motivate behavior change.

In a missional church, preaching and communication always assume skeptics are present and consequently engages their stories. To enter the culture’s stories mean showing sympathy towards and deeply acquainting with literature, music, theatre, and other arts expressing the existing hopes, dreams, heroic narratives and fears. To retell the culture’s stories is to show how only in Christ can we have freedom without slavery and embrace-of-the-other without injustice.

**3. Theologically train laypeople for public life and vocation**

In a missional church, laypeople need theological education to “think Christianly” about everything and work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know three things: (a) which cultural practices manifest common grace and are to be embraced, (b) which practices are antithetical to the Gospel and must be rejected, and (c) which practices can be adapted/revised.

Christians will have to use the Gospel to demonstrate true, biblical love and tolerance in the public square towards those with whom we deeply differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which groups with opposing views show towards Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main “defeater” of the Gospel in the non-Christian West.

**4. Create Christian community that is countercultural and counterintuitive**

In Christendom, “fellowship” is basically just a set of nurturing relationships, support, and accountability.

In a missional church, however, Christian community must go beyond that to embody a counterculture, showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power.

* *In sex*. We avoid both the secular society’s idolization of sex and traditional society’s fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different from ours.
* *In money*. We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, and the economically and physically weak.
* *In power*. We are committed to power sharing and relationship building among races and classes that are alienated outside of the body of Christ. A missional church must be deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice and deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion.

**5. Practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level**

It is very important that we do not spend time bashing and criticizing other kinds of churches. That criticism simply plays into the common “defeater” that Christians are all intolerant. While we align ourselves in denominations that share many of our distinctives, at the local level we should cooperate with, reach out to, and support the other congregations and churches in our area. This will raise many thorny issues, of course, but our bias should be in the direction of cooperation.

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

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# The Great Debates (Acts 16:1-10)

Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10*](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10)

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. 23 They sent this letter with them: From the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings! 24 Since we have heard that some have gone out from among us with no orders from us and have confused you, upsetting your minds by what they said, 25 we have unanimously decided to choose men to send to you along with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, 26 who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ([Acts 15:22-26](javascript:%7b%7d)).[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P10_861)

36 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing.” 37 Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too, 38 but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. 39 They had a sharp disagreement, so that they parted company. Barnabas took along Mark and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and set out, commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers and sisters. 41 He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

1 He also came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple named Timothy was there, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 As they went through the towns, they passed on the decrees that had been decided on by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the Gentile believers to obey. 5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number every day.

6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this, 8 so they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” 10 After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them ([Acts 15:36](javascript:%7b%7d)—16:10).

### Introduction[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P15_3662)

Having studied the inspired account of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas and their resulting separation, I began to wonder how this incident could have been reported today. For example, suppose that this “**sharp disagreement**” was reported in one of those tabloid magazines you see at the grocery store checkout stand (the kind that report a woman having a 120-pound baby). I can see the headlines reading: **“PAUL GIVES BARNABAS A BLACK EYE – BARNABAS SPLITS!”** Or imagine how this might have been handled in a White House Press Release: “**BARNABAS ACCEPTS CHALLENGING NEW ROLE IN CYPRUS – OLD FRIENDS RELUCTANTLY PART.”** If this were a fairy tale, it would read something like this: “And the two friends made up and lived happily ever after.”

Luke has chosen to characterize the parting of Paul and Barnabas in a different way. He does not sensationalize nor editorialize. He gives a very brief account of the events and then moves on.

I’ve taught this text before on several occasions. As I have prepared for this message, I have had to admit to myself that I am uncomfortable with this text. In fact, I’m uncomfortable with my own interpretation of it in the past. Previously, I have taken the position that neither Paul nor Barnabas was wrong; indeed, both were right. Each was simply exercising his own spiritual gift. But somehow this explanation doesn’t seem to square with all the facts. Let us look first at the text which describes the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, and then I’ll tell you why it makes me uncomfortable.

#### Deadlock [Acts 15:36-41](javascript:%7b%7d)

36 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing.” 37 Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too, 38 but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P21_6135) in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. 39 They had a sharp disagreement, so that they parted company. Barnabas took along Mark and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and set out, commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers and sisters. 41 He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Judas and Silas, along with Paul and Barnabas, went down to Antioch bearing the letter from the leaders in Jerusalem. Judas and Silas spent some time ministering in Antioch and then returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas stayed on in Antioch for some time. Eventually, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return to the churches they had planted. It was no mere social call (“**visit**”) that he had in mind, however. It was, so to speak, a pastoral visitation. The word rendered “**visit**” in verse 36 means much more than just to stop by for a friendly visit. Consider a couple of other texts where this same term is employed:

“‘I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you **took care of** me, I was in prison and you visited me’” ([Matthew 25:36](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because he **has come to help** and has redeemed his people” ([Luke 1:68](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to **care for** orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world ([James 1:27](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Paul was concerned for the well-being of those who had come to faith in their previous missionary journey. He knew that the Judaisers would be seeking to persuade these new believers to undergo circumcision and to keep the Law of Moses. He wanted to deliver the letter from the Jerusalem leaders and to minister to these saints. It was much more than a friendly visit. This was a follow-up visitation.

Barnabas was in agreement with this mission, and he was more than willing to accompany Paul on this journey. But he was determined that his cousin,[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P28_8287) John Mark, would accompany them. Paul disagreed strongly. He was unwilling to take Mark along when he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work to which they had been called. Paul and Barnabas were on the “front lines,” and this was a very dangerous place to be. Mark had failed the test once, and Paul was not about to take the same risk a second time.

Luke does not provide a lot of detail here, and we should not seek to go beyond the facts he has supplied. But he does inform us that they had a “**sharp disagreement**.” This was not a casual conversation; it was a strong difference of opinion, with irreconcilable differences. And thus the two had to part paths, seemingly never to partner in ministry again. Barnabas took Mark and returned to Cyprus. We are not told that he chose another partner in ministry, nor that he went back to Cyprus to do what Paul and Silas were going to do in Asia Minor. Barnabas simply drops out of sight. Paul chooses Silas to accompany him on his second missionary journey. Silas had ministered with Paul in Antioch ([Acts 15:25-27](javascript:%7b%7d), 32). He was also known as Silvanus.[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P30_9451) Paul and Silas were commended to the grace of God by the believers in Antioch and sent on their way.

Leaving Antioch, Paul and Silas first traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. We should note, first of all, that Syria and Cilicia were named in the letter that was sent by the Jerusalem leaders:

They sent this letter with them: From the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings! ([Acts 15:23](javascript:%7b%7d))

In other words, the Jerusalem leaders had intended all along for this letter to be carried to the churches in Syria and Cilicia, and not just to the church at Antioch. Indeed, this letter would be delivered to all the churches that were planted in the first missionary journey (see [Acts 16:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We should also note that the first missionary journey did not bring the gospel to Syria and Cilicia. Paul and Barnabas went to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. From Cyprus, they sailed to Asia Minor. It is therefore likely that the churches that Paul and Silas “visited” in Syria and Cilicia were actually planted by Paul after he visited Jerusalem:

When the brothers found out about this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus ([Acts 9:30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him, and I stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. 20 I assure you that, before God, I am not lying about what I am writing to you! 21 Afterward I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia ([Galatians 1:18-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### A Point of Application

Before we press on, let me pause to call a point of application to your attention. Note how quickly Barnabas is replaced by Silas. I would like to suggest that we keep this in mind, especially if we think of ourselves as indispensable. You will recall that Elijah thought of himself as the “**last prophet standing**.”[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P39_11492) He was certainly not the only true believer around for there were more than 7,000 who had remained faithful to God ([1 Kings 19:18](javascript:%7b%7d)). How quickly and how easily any of us can be replaced.

I wonder too if our text is not an example of how God, like a skillful coach, places just the right players on the field for what He has in mind. If you watch football, you know that there are specialty teams who train for particular tasks, such as the kickoff team, the punting team, the receiving or run-back team, the field goal team, the two-minute offense squad, and so on. I believe that Barnabas was just the right teammate for Paul on the first missionary journey. I likewise believe that Silas and Timothy (among others, perhaps, including Luke) were the right teammates for Paul on this second missionary journey. For example, when Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten in Philippi, Paul could rightly object that both of them were Roman citizens ([Acts 16:37](javascript:%7b%7d)). We know that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, but was this true of Barnabas, or of John Mark? Perhaps not. Thus, the personnel changes on this second missionary team may very well have been God’s strategic planning, so that the impact of this team could be maximized. Those things which at first appear to be tragic may later become evident as the work of our all-wise God for our good and for His glory ([Romans 8:28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### What Makes Me Uncomfortable with This Text

I’m about to share some of the reasons why I’m uncomfortable with my former “no-fault interpretation” of this text, but first I would like to explain why Barnabas has become my hero, and thus why I’ve worked so hard to defend him here in this text.

Barnabas truly was a great man. We first met him in [Acts 4](javascript:%7b%7d). There Luke described the newly-born church in the passion of its early days. There were many financial needs among the saints, and those who had material resources entrusted these to the apostles, who distributed them to those in need. Barnabas was named as an example of this early generosity:

36 So Joseph, a Levite who was a native of Cyprus, called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated “son of encouragement”), 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and placed it at the apostles’ feet ([Acts 4:36-37](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We do not hear of Barnabas again in Acts until chapter 9. Saul has just been dramatically converted as a result of his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. When the Jews sought to kill Saul, he fled to Jerusalem, where he attempted to meet with other Christians. No one wanted to believe that Saul was now a Christian, and so they refused to meet with him. It was Barnabas who came to Saul’s rescue, personally vouching for him. It was thanks to Barnabas that Saul eventually enjoyed fellowship with the Jerusalem saints ([Acts 9:26-28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

As a result of Stephen’s stoning and the persecution that followed, some believers fled from Jerusalem and preached the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch:

19 Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews. 20 But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. 21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord ([Acts 11:19-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that a Gentile church had been planted in Antioch, they recognized their responsibility to strengthen and establish this work. And who would they send? Barnabas was their choice. It is not long before Barnabas heads out to search for Saul, and to bring him to Antioch where he would help strengthen the believers ([Acts 11:25-26](javascript:%7b%7d)). And when Agabus the prophet came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, he warned that a severe famine would soon come all over the world. The saints at Antioch took up a collection for the needy saints in Judea and sent these funds to the Judea, choosing Barnabas and Saul to deliver it to the church ([Acts 11:27-30](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It was “**Barnabas and Saul**” who were set apart by the Spirit and sent out by the church at Antioch to evangelize the Gentiles ([Acts 13:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)). Clearly, Barnabas was viewed as the leader of this missionary team, when they were sent out by the church.[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P50_15887) But when they reached Paphos and encountered the opposition of Elymas (also known as Bar-Jesus), Paul took the initiative in rebuking this Jewish adversary, pronouncing a temporary spell of blindness upon him ([Acts 13:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d)). From this point on, it is “**Paul and his companions**” ([Acts 13:13](javascript:%7b%7d)) or “**Paul and Barnabas**” ([Acts 13:42, 46](javascript:%7b%7d)). Leadership has shifted from Barnabas to Paul. The wonder of it all is that Barnabas seems to have graciously received this “reorganization” as from the hand of God. How many men can graciously accept what amounts to a demotion with grace? Barnabas was one of those men. He is truly one of the great men of the New Testament.

Having said this, I find myself uneasy after reading Luke’s account of the split-up of Paul and Barnabas in our text. In spite of all the supporting evidence that I set forth in my last exposition of this text,[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P52_16855) I find that I cannot even convince myself that this break-up was a no-fault separation. Let me share some of the aspects of this brief account[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P53_17045) which trouble me.

### Troubling Matters and Some Answers

*(1) The break-up of Paul and Barnabas is decribed in juxtaposition with the argument that precipitated the Jerusalem Council.*There were strongly divergent opinions voiced concerning the salvation of Gentiles. As a result of the teaching of some, the gospel itself was under siege; the decision of this council in Jerusalem was monumental. Many people were involved in this debate, but when the dust settled, the leaders in Jerusalem reached a unanimous decision ([Acts 15:25](javascript:%7b%7d)): salvation (for Jew or Gentile) was by grace through faith, apart from works ([Acts 15:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d)). No Gentile need be circumcised, nor should he be compelled to keep the Old Testament Law. Thus the “great debate” was settled truthfully, peacefully, and with unity. The debate between Paul and Barnabas does not end on such an upbeat note. They do not come to one mind on the issue of taking John Mark along on their second missionary journey. And so it is that we have a debate of great importance being settled nicely, and another debate (which isn’t a matter of fundamental doctrine) which is never really settled, but instead results in two men going their own separate ways. When a nice, neat solution is followed by a messy solution, we don’t tend to feel good about it.

*(2) Paul’s objection to taking John Mark along on their second missionary journey was that he had abandoned them on the first missionary journey (*[*Acts 15:38*](javascript:%7b%7d)*). Now, it looks as though Barnabas has left his responsibilities prematurely, before his mission is finished.* The decision of the Jerusalem Council was officially recorded in the letter that was written to the churches in “**Antioch and Syria and Cilicia**” ([Acts 15:23](javascript:%7b%7d)). In this letter, they commended Barnabas and Paul, along with Judas and Silas ([Acts 15:25-27](javascript:%7b%7d)). Judas and Silas were sent back to Jerusalem from Antioch ([Acts 15:33](javascript:%7b%7d)). One would have expected both Paul and Barnabas to continue on to the churches in Syria and Cilicia,[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P57_19230) but only Paul does so ([Acts 15:40-41](javascript:%7b%7d)).It seems as though Barnabas has abandoned his post (not unlike Mark) by not finishing his task. Paul quickly replaced Barnabas with Silas and shortly thereafter chose Timothy to fill the place of John Mark. Barnabas took only John Mark. There was no real “team” that went to Cyprus. We don’t hear of Barnabas again. We don’t know what ministry he had in Cyprus. He just disappears. The church at Antioch (in which Barnabas had such a prominent leadership role) commended Paul and Silas to the grace of God as they set out, but no such commendation is mentioned with regard to Barnabas. One is tempted to wonder whether Barnabas was more devoted to his cousin Mark than he was to the new believers in Asia Minor.

All in all, one does not come away feeling good about the outcome of this strong disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, while one does feel good about the outcome of the strong disagreement that precipitated the Jerusalem Council.

*So what is the solution?* My problem (of feeling uneasy, and wanting to justify Barnabas) was not with the text, but with me. I have tended to idolize these two great men. I found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that every leader has flaws. We dare not idolize any man, whether that man be Moses, David, Solomon, Peter, Barnabas, or Paul. We are to imitate godly men and women to the degree that they follow Christ.[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P60_20785) When we idolize men, we either deny their flaws or overlook them, and we turn our eyes from God to men. To idolize men is to make them idols, taking the place of God. The fact is that no one should be idolized, because no one but God is perfect; no one follows Christ perfectly. Peter and Barnabas had to be publicly rebuked because of their hypocrisy in dealing with the Gentiles ([Galatians 2:11-21](javascript:%7b%7d)). Paul was given a “**thorn in the flesh**” to keep him from exalting himself ([2 Corinthians 12:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Our text (and any other Scripture passage) is not about the greatness of men, but rather it is about the greatness of our God.* We are not to glory in men, but to glory in God:

26 Think about the circumstances of your call, brothers and sisters. Not many were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were born to a privileged position. 27 But God chose what the world thinks foolish to shame the wise, and God chose what the world thinks weak to shame the strong. 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, what is regarded as nothing, to set aside what is regarded as something, 29 so that no one can boast in his presence. 30 He is the reason you have a relationship with Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, “***Let the one who boasts****,* ***boast in the Lord***” ([1 Corinthians 1:26-31](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Our text is not about the greatness of men, but about the grace of God*. In the past, I sought to excuse Barnabas for departing by giving him the credit for Mark’s restoration. I pointed to these words of Paul:

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is a great help to me in ministry ([2 Timothy 4:11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Am I suggesting that Barnabas played no role in the restoration of John Mark? Not at all! But what I am saying is that ultimately the restoration of John Mark is due to the grace of God, and not to the greatness of Barnabas.

We are far too man-centered. We find men that we idolize, and then we seek to be just like them. They write books about how they found the key to success, and then we seek to do our ministry just like they have done theirs. We look for men to mentor us and to give us inspiration and leadership. God does use others in our lives, but we cross the line when we are more dependent on men than we are on God, and when we give the glory to men rather than to God.

One way that we can tell whether we idolize men or not is the degree to which we are devastated by the failure of those we respect and admire. All of us should be disappointed and grieved when a Christian leader fails or falls, but we should not be completely surprised. I have served as an elder in a local church for nearly 30 years, and I can tell you that I have made some foolish mistakes. I can tell you that the elders have collectively made mistakes. And even when we have done the right thing, we have never done it perfectly. We are mere men, and thus we are not perfect. We live in an imperfect world which suffers and groans, waiting for that day when the perfect will come ([Romans 8:18-25](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Corinthians 13:9-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Within the confines of the evangelical faith, there is no denomination that is perfect, that has it all right. There is no theological system (not even my own) that is without its flaws and weaknesses (even if we don’t see or acknowledge them). No local church gets everything right. This is why true believers dare not isolate themselves, but must maintain unity and fellowship, because the strengths of others shore up our weaknesses, and our strengths shore up the weaknesses of others. We dare not be autonomous, attempting to live out our faith in isolation from the body of Christ. Our weaknesses should cause us to depend upon others in the body, rather than to depend only on ourselves.

I agonized because the first argument in [Acts 15](javascript:%7b%7d) (the Jerusalem Council) ended so well, while the second argument (between Paul and Barnabas) did not. *And then I realized a very important reason why the argument between Paul and Barnabas follows the decision of the Jerusalem Council.* The Jerusalem Council concluded that Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by grace, through faith, and not of works. If men were to be saved by Law-keeping, they would have to live perfectly, and that is impossible (see [Acts 13:38-39; 15:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d)). If we are saved by grace, through faith, and not by works, then we don’t have to be perfect. We trust in the Perfect Savior and His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. And even after we are saved, we don’t have to be perfect. Indeed, we cannot be perfect. We still struggle with the flesh, and our flesh is sometimes overcome by sin ([Romans 7](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [1 John 1:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Just as we are saved by grace, through faith, so we serve by grace through faith:

6 Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness ([Colossians 2:6-7](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [2 Corinthians 5:7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We who could not merit salvation by Law-keeping cannot be sanctified by Law-keeping either. We are sanctified on the same grounds that we were saved.

2 The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? ([Galatians 3:2-3](javascript:%7b%7d))

Having just read the verdict of the Jerusalem Council – that salvation is by faith, apart from works – why would I expect God’s servants (even giants like Barnabas, Peter, Paul, and John Mark) to live their lives perfectly? This is not an excuse to wallow in sin, or to be sloppy about obeying our Lord. But it does inform us that there are no perfect saints (in the sense that they never fail, never get angry, never think an evil thought, never make a bad decision, never deal harshly with someone).

Leaders don’t have to be perfect in order for us to follow them. Christians don’t have to be perfect for God to use them. The Book of Acts is about the greatness of God, about the sovereignty of God in salvation ([Acts 13:48; 16:14](javascript:%7b%7d)), sanctification ([Philippians 1:6](javascript:%7b%7d)), and evangelization. The degree to which the Great Commission is realized in Acts is not to be explained by giving men credit for doing everything right; *the success of the gospel is to be explained by the sovereignty of God,* who causes even the opposition of unbelievers and the failures of the saints to achieve His foreordained purposes. Acts is not about great men, but about mere men who have been empowered and used by a great God to do great things. I need not ignore, deny, or gloss over the failures of men, even apostles, to assure myself that God’s purposes will be accomplished. His purposes are accomplished through imperfect human instruments. Our weaknesses are designed to cause us to lean more heavily upon God, rather than to trust in our own strength:

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us ([2 Corinthians 4:7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me - so that I would not become arrogant. 8 I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. 10 Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong ([2 Corinthians 12:7](javascript:%7b%7d)b-10).

#### Galatia Revisited [Acts 16:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 He also came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple named Timothy was there, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 As they went through the towns, they passed on the decrees that had been decided on by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the Gentile believers to obey. 5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number every day.

Luke tells us that Paul and Silas traveled from Derbe to Lystra (verse 1), but in [Acts 14](javascript:%7b%7d), they traveled from Lystra to Derbe ([Acts 14:8-20](javascript:%7b%7d)). The explanation is clear when one looks at a map of Paul’s first and second missionary journeys. On the first journey, they first sailed to Cyprus, and then sailed north from Cyprus to Asia Minor, coming to Perga. From here, they traveled south to Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, and finally Derbe. They then retraced their steps to Perga, and finally sailed from Attalia to Syrian Antioch. On the second missionary journey, they traveled from Antioch in Syria to Asia Minor by land, traveling north. And thus they came to these cities in reverse order.

Two things are prominent in verses 1-5 of chapter 16. First, we have Luke’s report of how Paul chose Timothy to accompany him (verses 1-3). Second, we have a brief report about the delivery of the letter from the Jerusalem leaders, and its impact on the Galatian churches (verses 4-5).

It is hard to think of the selection of Timothy as anything but a replacement for John Mark (just as Silas was a replacement for Barnabas). I find it most interesting that Mark’s replacement is said to have come from the city of Lystra, and that he was highly recommended by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Lystra, you will recall, is the city where Paul was stoned and left for dead ([Acts 14:19-20](javascript:%7b%7d)). I wonder if Timothy was one of those surrounding Paul’s body when he was laying there. My point in this is that Timothy lived in a very dangerous place, and yet his testimony was highly respected by the Christians who knew him and his testimony in that dangerous place. While John Mark was a young man who bailed out before they even reached Lystra, Timothy was a young man who emerged in the midst of opposition and danger. Here was the kind of young man whom Paul could trust when things got rough.

Our text is the commencement of a long and very close relationship between Paul and Timothy. Several times, Paul speaks of Timothy as “**his son**” in the faith.[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P84_31387) Just as there is a bond between a child and the mother who bore it through painful labor, so there seems to have been a bond between Timothy and Paul, who was stoned in the very city where Timothy lived. Timothy was one of those very rare folks who shared the same vision for ministry as Paul:

19 Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be encouraged by hearing news about you. 20 For there is no one here like him who will readily demonstrate his deep concern for you. 21 Others are busy with their own concerns, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know his qualifications, that like a son working with his father, he served with me in advancing the gospel ([Philippians 2:19-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).

What an encouragement this young man must have been to Paul, his spiritual father in the faith.

The question in the minds of most is not Timothy’s qualifications to serve, but why Paul had him circumcised. This is a particularly glaring problem in light of the decision of the Jerusalem Council and the events that surrounded it:

1 Then after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking Titus along too. 2 I went there because of a revelation and presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did so only in a private meeting with the influential people, to make sure that I was not running - or had not run - in vain. 3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek. 4 Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves. 5 But we did not surrender to them even for a moment, in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with you ([Galatians 2:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

There were those who were teaching the believers that in order for a Gentile to be saved they must, like a Jew, be circumcised and then keep the Law of Moses ([Acts 15:1, 5](javascript:%7b%7d)). When Paul went to Jerusalem, he took Barnabas and Titus along with him. The Judaisers insisted that Titus must be circumcised because he was a Greek. Paul absolutely refused because it would compromise the gospel. It was the gospel that was at stake here, and Paul would not allow it to be perverted into a system of works, rather than grace.

Why then would Paul soon thereafter circumcise Timothy? Was Paul compromising the gospel in doing so? Not at all! Titus was a Gentile, and everyone knew it. Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother, but his father was a Greek. Circumcising Timothy identified him as a Jew. As such, he could accompany Paul wherever he went. Circumcision did not compromise the gospel, because no Jews were demanding that he be circumcised. No one was insisting that he had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Circumcision was Timothy’s identification with the faith of his mother, and this enabled him to minister to the Jews more effectively:

19 For since I am free from all I can make myself a slave to all, in order to gain even more people. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew to gain the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) to gain those under the law. 21 To those free from the law I became like one free from the law (though I am not free from God’s law but under the law of Christ) to gain those free from the law. 22 To the weak I became weak in order to gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I may save some. 23 I do all these things because of the gospel, so that I can be a participant in it ([1 Corinthians 9:19-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It was Paul who wanted Timothy to be circumcised in order to minister more effectively, not some Jewish false brethren who were demanding that he be circumcised in order to be saved. Timothy was not really a Gentile either, and these factors made all the difference in the world. The gospel was therefore not compromised, but rather it was promoted by Timothy’s circumcision.

As this missionary team passed through the cities of Galatia, cities that had heard the gospel on the first missionary journey, they delivered the decrees which had been determined by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. In this way, the churches were freed from the burden the Judaisers sought to impose upon new Gentile converts. And thus the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were growing daily in number. Grace not only gives life to those who are dead in their sins, it produces growth in those who have been saved. Those who are saved by faith are to walk by faith, and thus to grow in their relationship with God through Christ.

#### The Macedonian Call [Acts 16:6-10](javascript:%7b%7d)

6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this, 8 so they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” 10 After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them ([Acts 16:6-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

As initially proposed by Paul, their mission had been fulfilled:

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing” ([Acts 15:36](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy have visited the Galatian churches and have delivered the decrees from the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem. They have no doubt taught these churches additional truths they needed to know. But having completed this part of this journey, they sought to press on to preach the gospel elsewhere.

The second missionary journey is something like a two-stage rocket launching. The first stage gets the rocket off the ground and into the air. Then this stage is jettisoned and the second stage is ignited, taking it much farther into space. So it was with this missionary journey. The first stage took Paul and his companions back to the churches that had been planted earlier. Having completed this “stage” of the mission, it is time for the second “stage” to be launched. The ways in which God guided them to the “second stage” of their mission are both interesting and informative.

We would like to have been told a great deal more than Luke has included in his account. I believe that Luke’s report is all that we need to know, and that additional information may even have proven to be counter-productive. God first used “closed doors” to guide these missionaries. In some unspecified way, the Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching in Asia. How we would love to know the means the Spirit employed to make this clear to Paul and the others. The problem is that we would probably expect God to guide us in the same way. The important thing is that Paul and his associates recognized this closed door as God’s guidance. For whatever reason, they were not to preach the gospel in Asia on this trip.

Having been prevented from preaching the gospel in Asia, they ventured on to Mysia, but they were prevented from proceeding on to Bithynia. Once again the “**Spirit of Jesus**” would not allow them to do so. Since God closed these doors, the missionaries made their way to Troas on the coast of the Aegean Sea. This is something like Moses and the Israelites on the shores of the Red Sea, wondering where they can go.

This was a critical point in this second missionary journey. God had prevented them from preaching in Asia and Bithynia, but He has not yet informed them as to where they are to preach. During the night, Paul receives a vision which we have come to know as the “Macedonian Vision”:

9 A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” 10 After Paul saw the vision, **we** attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them ([Acts 16:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

The vision came to Paul in the night. He saw a man urging him to “**Come over to Macedonia and help us!**” The entire group recognized this as divine guidance and immediately began seeking to go over to Macedonia to preach the gospel.

There is a subtle, but informative, clue to be found in verse 10: “**After Paul saw the vision, *we* attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia. . . .**” Suddenly Luke’s account shifts from the third person (“**they**”) to the first person (“**we**”).[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P106_40096) Luke seems to have joined these missionaries in Troas. He will soon disappear, only to reappear with Paul in [Acts 20:6](javascript:%7b%7d). At such times, Luke is reporting from personal experience.

### Conclusion

I would like to conclude by considering what our text has to teach us about divine guidance. There are those who believe that God must guide His children by continually revealing (in a supernatural way) what they should do at any moment. If this were true, one would expect that it would be taught in the Book of Acts. After all, this is the book in which the Holy Spirit is more prominent than almost any other book of the Bible. This is the book where signs and wonders are as frequent as they are in the Gospels. Should we not expect God to guide His followers in some very dramatic and spectacular ways?

In addition to highlighting the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the church, another prominent theme in the Book of Acts is the sovereignty of God in history and in the church. Nothing is outside of God’s control. We see this throughout the Book of Acts. The theme of God’s sovereignty, combined with the prominence of the Holy Spirit, might lead us to expect almost constant supernatural guidance. But this is not really the case.

It would be safe to say that God does guide in supernatural and spectacular ways – occasionally. But this is hardly the norm in the Book of Acts. Let us consider how God has guided up to this point.

God revealed His will to His church in Acts chapter 1:

6 So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him, “Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He told them, “You are not permitted to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and **you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth**” ([Acts 1:6-8](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

God’s will was for the gospel to be proclaimed, in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest parts of the earth. When we reach the end of the Book of Acts, we will see that this was partially achieved to one degree or another. How this comes to pass is a whole different story.

The Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost, and through the preaching of Peter, many came to faith ([Acts 2](javascript:%7b%7d)). The church in Jerusalem continued to grow, despite considerable opposition and a number of obstacles. When Ananias and Sapphira lied about their gift to the church, both were divinely disciplined, and although the unbelievers in Jerusalem were reluctant to associate themselves with the church, they did hold Christians in high regard, and many were being saved ([Acts 5:11-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When some of their widows were being overlooked, the apostles determined that seven men of great character should be appointed to oversee this ministry. They did so in order that they (the apostles) might not be hindered from their primary ministry of “**prayer and the ministry of the word**” ([Acts 6:2-4](javascript:%7b%7d)). The church did select seven good men, but the irony was that God used two of these men (Stephen and Philip) to have a profound evangelistic impact – Stephen by his death and Philip by his life and ministry. Stephen’s death precipitated a great outbreak of persecution against the church, and this caused the saints in Jerusalem to scatter abroad, taking the good news of the gospel with them ([Acts 8:1-4; 11:19](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). Philip took the gospel to Samaria, and to the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:5-40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Up to this point in Acts, Luke’s account contains only one report of direct, supernatural guidance. This was when the Spirit guided Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, resulting in his salvation. Other than this, God guided His followers more by providence than by direct revelation. The conversion of Saul would change the course of world missions, and this was the result of a personal encounter with the risen Lord ([Acts 9:1-19](javascript:%7b%7d)). Another instance of direct divine guidance is reported in [Acts 10](javascript:%7b%7d). Here, Peter requires a dramatic revelation to convince him that he should go to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, and preach the gospel ([Acts 10:9-20](javascript:%7b%7d)). Another divine revelation was required to convince Cornelius to send for Peter to preach the gospel in his home ([Acts 9:1-8](javascript:%7b%7d)). The result was not only the conversion of Cornelius and his guests, but the realization on the part of Peter’s Jewish colleagues that God intended to save Gentiles as well as Jews (see [Acts 11:18](javascript:%7b%7d)). God spoke to Peter, but through Peter, He also spoke to the church.

In the latter part of [Acts 11](javascript:%7b%7d), God worked through an unnamed and unknown (to the reader) group of Jews who fled from Jerusalem, but who preached to gospel to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Thus a church was founded in Antioch, and this church would be the hub of the missionary movement that was about to be born. The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to minister to this new church at Antioch. Barnabas promptly located Saul and brought him to minister at Antioch with him. This ministry was the beginning of something very significant in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

God guides from behind the scenes in [Acts 12](javascript:%7b%7d). For His own reasons, God allowed Herod to execute James, one of our Lord’s inner three. He fully intended to cater to the Jews by executing Peter, but a divine deliverance prevented that. And by the end of chapter 12, Herod is no longer the one who takes life, but is the one whose life is taken, because he accepted the praise of men as though he were a god. I believe that the death of Herod changed the course of the history of the church, for if he had been allowed to live and to continue executing the leaders of the church, things would have been much different. God was guiding, but His hand was not readily apparent (except to the reader of Acts).

Now, in [Acts 13](javascript:%7b%7d), God directs the church in Antioch to set Barnabas and Saul apart for “the work to which He had called them” ([Acts 13:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d)). This guidance did not come to Barnabas, or to Paul, but through the Spirit to the church. There was no need to specify what “the work to which they were called” might be. Their ministry up to this point had made this apparent. It would appear that God did not directly reveal every place that Barnabas and Paul would preach the gospel. Sometimes the next course of action was evident by the opposition they faced. Sometimes God providentially directed their course, as when Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed and went their separate ways ([Acts 15:36-41](javascript:%7b%7d)). Sometimes God guided by closing doors to ministry ([Acts 16:6-7](javascript:%7b%7d)). And then there were the rare occasions when God spoke directly (that is, through a vision) to reveal where they should go.

*My point is that we should look for divine guidance from a variety of indicators.* First and foremost, we should be guided by the Word of God. The Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d)) is a very clear revelation of God’s will. Sometimes circumstances (open and closed doors) will indicate the path or course of action we should take. Sometimes God guides through the painful events of our lives, as when He guided Paul to take Silas as a partner and Timothy as his helper. The fact is that when all is said and done, God’s will is accomplished, in a way that glorifies Him and not men. The good news for Christians is that even though men fail, God’s purposes and promises are always fulfilled.

It is with great sadness that I read our text and see Paul and Barnabas parting ways. But it is with great joy and confidence that I see how God used this unpleasant parting to achieve His gracious purposes. To God be the glory!

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P10_862) Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P15_3663) Copyright © 2006 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson 22 in the *Studies in the Book of Acts* series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on April 30, 2006. Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit. The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P21_6136) I believe that “**left them**” is too weak an expression here. John Mark “deserted” them in Pamphylia. The word that is used here is the root from which the term apostasy is derived.

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P28_8288) [Colossians 4:10](javascript:%7b%7d).

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P30_9452) [2 Corinthians 1:19](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Thessalonians 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Thessalonians 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Peter 5:12](javascript:%7b%7d).

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P39_11493) [1 Kings 19:10, 14](javascript:%7b%7d).

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P50_15888) I deduce this from the word order and by the names employed (“**Barnabas . . . and Saul**”).

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P52_16856) [/seriespage/when-division-becomes-multiplication-acts-153682111610](https://bible.org/seriespage/when-division-becomes-multiplication-acts-153682111610)

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P53_17046) I should point out that Luke keeps his account brief. He does not seek to make anyone look bad, but neither does he “gild the lily” to make the situation look better than it was.

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P57_19231) And, from there, to go on to the churches in Asia Minor that had been founded in the first missionary journey (see [Acts 16:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P60_20786) See [1 Corinthians 4:16](javascript:%7b%7d): 11:1; [Ephesians 5:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Thessalonians 1:6](javascript:%7b%7d); [Hebrews 13:7](javascript:%7b%7d).

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P84_31388) [1 Timothy 1:18](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1](javascript:%7b%7d).

[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/22-great-debates-acts-161-10" \l "P106_40097) See “**we**” in verses 11, 12, and 13, “**us**” in verse 17.

# A Closer Look at Open and Closed Doors (Acts 16:11-40)

Deffibaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40*](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40)

6 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this, 8 so they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 A vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there urging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” 10 After Paul saw the vision, we attempted immediately to go over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them ([Acts 16:6-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P10_796)

11 We put out to sea from Troas and sailed a straight course to Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of that district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. We stayed in this city for some days. 13 On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there. 14 A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a God-fearing woman, listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. 15 After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, “If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us.

16 Now as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means. She brought her owners a great profit by fortune-telling. 17 She followed behind Paul and us and kept crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” 18 She continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out of her at once. 19 But when her owners saw their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. 20 When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion. They are Jews 21 and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us to accept or practice, since we are Romans.” 22 The crowd joined the attack against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After they had beaten them severely, they threw them into prison and commanded the jailer to guard them securely. 24 Receiving such orders, he threw them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the rest of the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately all the doors flew open, and the bonds of all the prisoners came loose. 27 When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, because he assumed the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul called out loudly, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” 29 Calling for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them outside and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house. 33 At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and all his family were baptized right away. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set food before them, and he rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household.

35 At daybreak the magistrates sent their police officers, saying, “Release those men.” 36 The jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent orders to release you. So come out now and go in peace.” 37 But Paul said to the police officers, “They had us beaten in public without a proper trial - even though we are Roman citizens - and they threw us in prison. And now they want to send us away secretly? Absolutely not! They themselves must come and escort us out!” 38 The police officers reported these words to the magistrates. They were frightened when they heard Paul and Silas were Roman citizens 39 and came and apologized to them. After they brought them out, they asked them repeatedly to leave the city. 40 When they came out of the prison, they entered Lydia’s house, and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and then departed.[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P15_5045)

### Introduction[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P17_5949)

The last verses of chapter 15 and the first verses of [Acts 16](javascript:%7b%7d) describe the commencement of what we know as Paul’s “Second Missionary Journey.” Barnabas took John Mark and set out for Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas to replace Barnabas, and passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening these churches as they made their way to the Galatian churches founded on the “First Missionary Journey.” When Paul came to Lystra, he encountered a young disciple named Timothy, who was highly regarded by the Christians in the area. Timothy was circumcised and then taken along with Paul and Silas. They passed through the Galatian cities, delivering the decrees from the Jerusalem church leaders. The churches were strengthened and experienced continued growth.

Initially, the plan was simply to revisit the churches that had been founded on the “First Missionary Journey,” but having completed this task, Paul and his companions sought to preach the gospel in Asia, but they were “**forbidden by the Holy Spirit**” ([Acts 16:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). Next they sought to go into Bithynia, but the “**Spirit of Jesus**” would not permit this either ([Acts 16:7](javascript:%7b%7d)). When they reached Troas, Paul had a vision in the night. A Macedonian man[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P20_7735) was urging Paul to “**come over to Macedonia and help us**” ([Acts 16:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). The next morning, they set sail for Macedonia.

In verses 5 and 6, we find two occasions when the Spirit of God “closed the door” on preaching the gospel in a particular place. In verses 9 and 10, we find an “open door.” I believe it will be beneficial to consider the difference between closed doors and open doors in this chapter. In addition to this, we will learn how the church at Philippi was born. This is one of the truly great churches in the New Testament, one that gave Paul great cause for rejoicing.

In our text, Luke chooses to focus on three different individuals: Lydia, the seller of purple; the demon possessed slave girl who was a fortune teller; and the Philippian jailer. I do not believe that these are the only folks with whom Paul and Silas dealt on this visit,[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P23_8690) but somehow these give us a flavor of what the ministry was like.

#### Down by the Riverside [Acts 16:11-15](javascript:%7b%7d)

11 We put out to sea from Troas and sailed a straight course to Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of that district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. We stayed in this city for some days. 13 On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there. 14 A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a God-fearing woman, listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. 15 After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, “If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us.

Samothrace was little more than a mountain jutting out of the sea to a height of about 5,000 feet. There was a port there, and it may well be that they made port for the night, sailing on the next day to the Macedonian port city of Neapolis. From here, it was only a ten-mile walk to Philippi. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke would spend a number of days here before moving on.

On the Sabbath day, they went to the river because there was no synagogue in Philippi, and this is where they expected to find any Jewish worshippers. Apparently no men were present, but there were some women with whom they spoke. One of these women was named Lydia, a God-fearer from Thyatira. She listened, and God opened her heart to respond to the news that Jesus was the Promised Messiah. After she and her household were baptized, she prevailed upon these missionaries to stay in her home while they were in Philippi. And so the first Gentile convert in Macedonia is a woman.

#### Paul Liberates a Slave Woman, and It Costs a Fortune [Acts 16:16-24](javascript:%7b%7d)

16 Now as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means. She brought her owners a great profit by fortune-telling. 17 She followed behind Paul and us and kept crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” 18 She continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out of her at once. 19 But when her owners saw their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. 20 When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion. They are Jews 21 and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us to accept or practice, since we are Romans.” 22 The crowd joined the attack against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After they had beaten them severely, they threw them into prison and commanded the jailer to guard them securely. 24 Receiving such orders, he threw them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Paul seems to return to the place of prayer just as he would have the synagogue, had there been one. On the way to the place of prayer, a slave girl confronted[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P32_12175) them. She was demon-possessed, and the spirit that controlled her enabled her to foretell the future as a fortune teller. This woman was owned by others, and she made a fortune for them. It may be puzzling for some to hear what this demonized young woman constantly shouted as she followed Paul and the others:

“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation” ([Acts 16:17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Her words were true, but why would she say them? Let us first of all remember that similar things took place during the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus:

“Leave us alone, Jesus the Nazarene! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!” ([Mark 1:24](javascript:%7b%7d))

I am indebted to James Montgomery Boice[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P37_13247) for pointing out that references to God as the “**Most High God**” can be found in these Old Testament texts.

18 Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (Now he was the priest of the **Most High God**.) 19 He blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by the **Most High God**, Creator of heaven and earth ([Genesis 14:18-19](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

But Abram replied to the king of Sodom, “I raise my hand to **the Lord, the Most High God**, Creator of heaven and earth, and vow ([Genesis 14:22](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

“I will climb up to the tops of the clouds; **I will make myself like the Most High**!” ([Isaiah 14:14](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

The words of Melchizedek in [Genesis 14:19](javascript:%7b%7d) inform Abram that the God who called him, the God whom he serves, is the sovereign Creator of both the heavens and the earth. He is God of all gods and Ruler of all rulers. The next occurrence ([Genesis 14:22](javascript:%7b%7d)) indicates that Abram grasped this fact, and that he conveyed this by his own words to the king of Sodom. When Satan rebelled against God, it was his foolish attempt to assume this exalted position as God Most High. Why, then, would one of his minions introduce the preaching of the gospel by testifying to the sovereignty of his sworn enemy, the God of the universe? Let me suggest a reason.

You remember the Old Testament story about Balaam, the (false) prophet who was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land ([Numbers 22-25](javascript:%7b%7d)). Balaam really did want to earn the fee for doing so, but every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse the Israelites, he ended up blessing them (see [Numbers 23:1-13](javascript:%7b%7d)). The fact was that Balaam could not curse the Israelites because God had blessed them.

I seriously doubt that this slave girl intended to say what she did, but she was unable to say anything else. All she could do was speak the truth about Paul and his colleagues and the gospel they had come to preach. The problem does not seem to be what she said, but rather the distraction she created by saying it over and over again. She became, in effect, a heckler, whose presence was annoying, to say the least.

Paul put up with her distractions for a good while. One may wonder why Paul did not act sooner. I am inclined to think that Paul was not quick to confront the powers of hell. This is not because he lacked the power (in Christ) to do so, but simply because this kind of spiritual warfare is something that he never took lightly. Unfortunately, I have heard some Christians speak lightly of Satan and his power:

8 Yet these men, as a result of their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and insult the glorious ones. 9 But even when Michael the archangel was arguing with the devil and debating with him concerning Moses’ body, he did not dare to bring a slanderous judgment, but said, “May the Lord rebuke you!“ 10 But these men do not understand the things they slander, and they are being destroyed by the very things that, like irrational animals, they instinctively comprehend ([Jude 8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Eventually this young woman’s opposition became too much to bear, and Paul spoke to the spirit, commanding it to come out of this woman in the name of Jesus Christ. The spirit instantly obeyed. I find it interesting to note how eager some of the commentators are to believe that this young woman, like Lydia and (soon) the jailer, came to trust in the Lord Jesus. But I see absolutely no evidence that she did trust in Jesus. We are not told that she believed, though we are clearly told that Lydia and the jailer did. We are not told that she was baptized, but we are told that Lydia and the jailer were (with their households). We are not told that she wanted to show these missionaries hospitality, as did Lydia and the jailer. This woman was delivered from demon possession, and so far as I can tell, that is all.

Apparently it did not take long for this slave woman’s owners to realize that Paul had cost them a fortune, literally. They were greatly enraged, and so they laid hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them to the city officials. Their accusations sound familiar to anyone who is familiar with the Gospels and Acts. The accusations were designed to play upon the anti-Jewish sentiments of the citizens of Philippi (no wonder there were few Jews in Philippi). As Jesus was accused of misleading the people so as to violate Roman law, so Paul and Silas were accused of persuading people to oppose Roman law in Philippi. As the opposition stirred up the crowds against Jesus in Jerusalem, so they persuaded the crowds to oppose Paul and his associates in Philippi:

1 Then the whole group of them rose up and brought Jesus before Pilate. 2 They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man subverting our nation, forbidding us to pay the tribute tax to Caesar and claiming that he himself is Christ, a king.” 3 So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He replied, “You say so.” 4 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” 5 But they persisted in saying, “He incites the people by teaching throughout all Judea. It started in Galilee and ended up here!” . . . 14 and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. When I examined him before you, I did not find this man guilty of anything you accused him of doing” ([Luke 23:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d), 14).

At that moment Jesus said to the crowd, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me like you would an outlaw? Day after day I sat teaching in the temple courts, yet you did not arrest me?” ([Matthew 26:55](javascript:%7b%7d))

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed ([Matthew 27:20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

20 When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion. They are Jews 21 and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us to accept or practice, since we are Romans.” 22 The crowd joined the attack against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P52_19437) ([Acts 16:20-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We know that the beatings inflicted on Paul and Silas were illegal.[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P54_19606) In [Acts 22](javascript:%7b%7d), Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen and thereby escaped a beating.[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P55_19721) We must wonder why Paul endured such a beating here. He may not have had the opportunity to stop these (illegal) proceedings. His opponents were certainly not in a reasonable mood. He may have objected but was simply ignored, or his claim assumed to be false. He does not fail to claim his legal rights at the end of this chapter.

I am inclined to think that Paul’s words in [1 Corinthians 7](javascript:%7b%7d) may apply here:

20 Let each one remain in that situation in life in which he was called. 21Were you called as a slave? Do not worry about it. But if indeed you are able to be free, make the most of the opportunity ([1 Corinthians 7:20-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Paul is encouraging the Corinthian Christians to be content in whatever circumstances they were called to faith in Jesus. This applies to circumcision ([1 Corinthians 7:18-19](javascript:%7b%7d)), as it applies to slavery ([1 Corinthians 7:20-21](javascript:%7b%7d)). One who is saved as a slave should not agonize about his (or her) condition, because they can glorify God as a Christian slave. But, if the opportunity should arise where they could purchase their freedom, then they should do so.

I think this principle applies to Paul’s beating in Philippi. If he cannot, for one reason or another, escape from the beating, then he must suffer for the sake of Christ. He can endure this patiently, rejoicing in the privilege of suffering for Christ (see [1 Peter 1:18-25; 4:12-14](javascript:%7b%7d)), which is evident by the hymns they were singing to God while in that prison ([Acts 16:25](javascript:%7b%7d)). For whatever reason, the beating could not be avoided in a way that would honor Christ.

Luke informs us that “**the crowd joined the attack against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas. . .**” (verse 22). This was far from what we would consider “due process of the law.” This was a virtual riot, with the entire crowd out of control. Any objections would have been futile.

The jailer seems to enter the story at this point. Paul and Silas were beaten severely and then cast into prison. The jailer was instructed to guard them securely. The jailer took this charge seriously and placed (threw) them in an inner cell. In other words, they were in maximum security. When I worked in a prison, they called this “the hole.” To make doubly sure they could not escape, their feet were put in the stocks. One can only imagine the pain these two heroes of the faith endured on this occasion.

#### Beyond Escape [Acts 16:25-34](javascript:%7b%7d)

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the rest of the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately all the doors flew open, and the bonds of all the prisoners came loose. 27 When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, because he assumed the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul called out loudly, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” 29 Calling for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them outside and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house. 33 At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and all his family were baptized right away. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set food before them, and he rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household.

Escape from prison is nothing new in the Book of Acts. In chapter 5, Peter and John were arrested and placed in jail. During the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison gates and instructed the two apostles to go and preach publicly in the temple. The officers who went to retrieve the apostles to stand trial before the Sanhedrin found only an empty cell, securely locked and under guard. In chapter 12, Herod arrested Peter with the intent of executing him after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On that final night, an angel of the Lord personally escorted Peter from the prison, while the guards slept soundly. In this instance, Peter made a brief appearance at Mary’s home, where the saints had gathered to pray, and then he escaped to a place where he would not be found. We might expect something similar here in [Acts 16](javascript:%7b%7d), but even when every door is opened and every chain is loosed, neither Paul nor Silas (nor apparently anyone else) left. Escape was made easy, but no one fled. The question is obviously, “Why not?”

Some strange things were about to take place in that prison on this particular night. Can you imagine being incarcerated in that prison and hearing the sounds of singing echo through those stone corridors? I’m sure the sounds of cursing were often heard, as badly beaten men expressed their wrath toward God and man. But these were the sounds of men rejoicing, not men singing some mournful dirge. This was not something akin to “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen . . . .” This was much more like “Amazing Grace.” Luke tells us that “**the prisoners were listening**” (verse 25). I’ll bet they were listening.

I can remember the time that I was sharing my faith with a group of prisoners. One of the inmates said to the other, “Ain’t that something, man? Ain’t that something?” I’ll bet that’s what some of these prisoners were saying to each other. Prisons are very noisy places, and I suspect that every word of every song was heard, not to mention the prayers these two joyfully offered up to their God.

Suddenly there is a great earthquake. I don’t think a prison cell is the safest place to be when such a thing happens. These inmates must have thought they were goners. Every door flew open, and every chain fell loose. There was nothing to keep these men in their cells. They could easily escape under cover of darkness (and in the panic of the moment).

From what I know of prisons in that day (and even some jails today), the jailer probably lived in the upstairs part of the building while the prisoners were kept in the basement (or dungeon). The jailer was probably ejected from his bed. It would have taken him only a moment to realize what had happened and to comprehend the magnitude of this crisis for him personally. Luke tells us that the jailer saw all the prison doors opened. There was no way on earth that these doors could be wide open unless the prisoners had escaped. The jailer took out his sword and prepared to take his own life.

Luke tells us that Paul called out to the jailer in a loud voice. It is possible that in the darkness of that inner prison Paul might have seen the silhouette of the jailer, about to kill himself. That would be a very human, a very believable explanation. But it is also possible that God somehow made Paul aware of the jailer’s intentions, even without seeing him. This would explain why Paul called out to the jailer in a loud voice. Hearing Paul assure him that the prisoners were all present, the jailer called for lights to be brought so that he could see the status of things inside the prison.

How could he believe what he was seeing? Everyone was there and accounted for. One could at least expect the other inmates to have fled the prison, but all were present and accounted for. Why would the pagan inmates remain behind? I think it was because they realized something really big had just happened. The words they had heard sung and prayed were no empty claims. Their words had a ring of authority, now that they had rejoiced in their afflictions, and now that God had miraculously provided “**a way of escape**” (see [1 Corinthians 10:13](javascript:%7b%7d)). They were as eager to know that answer to the jailer’s question as he was.

Rushing into the inner prison where Paul and Silas remained, the jailer fell down before them and asked, “**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**” Who told him he needed to be saved? Had he heard the slave girl calling out that these men were “**servants of the Most High God who are proclaiming . . . the way of salvation**”? Had the jailer overheard their singing and the praying in the prison below him while he lay in his bed, listening to what was going on below? Somehow, God had prepared the heart of this jailer so that he was eager to hear what Paul and Silas had to say. Paul and Silas immediately responded with the “short version” of the gospel: “**Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household**.”

It is clear that this was but a summary of the gospel, and that much more was said as they talked on into the night. In addition to Paul’s abbreviated gospel in [Acts 16:31](javascript:%7b%7d), the very next verse reads, “**Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house**” (verse 32). No doubt Paul and Silas were explaining the gospel as the jailer washed their wounds. Then, the jailer was baptized, along with his entire household.

Verse 34 is fascinating and informative. *First*, we read that the jailer “**rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household.**” His joy, I take it, was the joy of his salvation, but also rejoicing in the fact that his household had come to share the faith with him. Luke is not telling us that the jailer’s faith was sufficient for his own salvation, and for that of his household. His faith was sufficient for his salvation, but it didn’t save others. Some are confused by the wording of the gospel as we find it in [Acts 16:31](javascript:%7b%7d):

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household” ([Acts 16:31](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The confusion may be caused by the wording of this verse in the King James Version:

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house ([Acts 16:31](javascript:%7b%7d), KJV).

Paul and Silas are answering the jailer’s question, which is, “**What must *I* do to be saved?**” (emphasis mine). The answer goes somewhat beyond the question. Paul and Silas (“**they**”) reply that the jailer need only believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved. But they add that this offer of salvation by faith is also extended to his entire household. They can all be saved as each one believes in the Lord Jesus. This is clear from what follows. In verse 32, we are told that Paul and Silas proclaimed the gospel to the jailer “***and”*** all those who were in his house. In verse 33, Luke tells us that this jailer “***and”*** all his family were baptized. In verse 34, Luke writes that the jailer rejoiced greatly because he believed “***together with”*** his entire household. Thus, the offer of salvation by faith was offered to all, explained to all, and received by all. The jailer’s faith saved him; the salvation of each family member came as each of them believed in the Lord Jesus.

*Secondly*, we are told that the jailer “**brought them into his house and set food before them**.” I believe this is an important detail to note. In the early chapters of Acts, we find that new believers practiced “table fellowship”:

Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts ([Acts 2:46](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When Lydia came to faith, she promptly invited Paul and his colleagues to stay in her home:

After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, “If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us ([Acts 16:15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now, when the Philippian jailer comes to faith, we find Paul and Silas at his table, sharing a meal in the early hours of the morning ([Acts 16:34](javascript:%7b%7d)). Sharing a common faith seems to be expressed by sharing a common meal. I wonder if observing communion isn’t related to this (see [1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-34](javascript:%7b%7d)). No wonder God made such a point of revoking the Old Testament food laws (see [Mark 7:14-23](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 10-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Galatians 2:11-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

#### Freedom Offered, but Not So Quickly Accepted [Acts 16:35-40](javascript:%7b%7d)

35 At daybreak the magistrates sent their police officers, saying, “Release those men.” 36 The jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent orders to release you. So come out now and go in peace.” 37 But Paul said to the police officers, “They had us beaten in public without a proper trial - even though we are Roman citizens - and they threw us in prison. And now they want to send us away secretly? Absolutely not! They themselves must come and escort us out!” 38 The police officers reported these words to the magistrates. They were frightened when they heard Paul and Silas were Roman citizens 39 and came and apologized to them. After they brought them out, they asked them repeatedly to leave the city. 40 When they came out of the prison, they entered Lydia’s house, and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and then departed ([Acts 16:35-40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When the police officers arrived with their message from the magistrates, the jailer surely saw this as good news. He had already given these two men freedom within the confines of the prison by taking them into his dwelling. Now they were free to go. What could be better news than this?

But freedom from that prison was not of primary importance to Paul. When the prison gates were all flung open by the earthquake and every chain loosed, Paul and Silas could have easily escaped. But that was not what God had in mind. They could have escaped, but then they would have been fugitives from justice. The church in Philippi would be subject to government oppression, and further ministry in Philippi would have been restricted. It was by remaining in the prison that God “opened the door” of the jailer’s heart.

Now, once again, there appears to be an “open door,” which would have granted Paul and Silas a legal release. But at what price? Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. They had been deprived of their rights as citizens of Rome. The beating they received, and their imprisonment, were illegal. The magistrates were undoubtedly hoping that Paul and Silas would silently slip out of town, never to be seen again. But that was not going to happen. Paul is not just “standing up for his rights;” he is standing up for what is right, and for what is best for the gospel, and for the new church.

In the future, Roman officials might feel the freedom to abuse Roman citizens who were Christians. They could beat them, and then let them go, just as they had done to Paul and Silas. The end result would be detrimental to the spread of the gospel. No. They were wrong to mistreat Roman citizens. Now they must publicly acknowledge their wrongdoing by making a public apology. This would leave Paul and Silas (and others who were Roman citizens) the right to travel freely among the churches in the empire. It would protect the church in Philippi from governmental oppression. Paul would not accept “freedom at any price.” He insisted that the officials obey the laws they were also charged to enforce. He took his beating well, but he did not tolerate injustice. I suspect that word of Paul’s actions made its way to other cities, and this may have given those officials pause. If they treated Paul and Silas illegally, they would be held responsible. Let me say it again; Paul’s “rights” are not primary here, but what *is* right, especially for the advance of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul and Silas did not hastily leave town either. When the magistrates had made their apology, Paul and Silas made their way to the home of Lydia. They would have needed to regroup with Timothy, and they also needed to use this as an opportunity to encourage the believers in this new church. What Paul would write to these saints at a later time was also relevant on this occasion:

12 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that my situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel: 13The whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that I am in prison for the sake of Christ ([Philippians 1:12-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### Conclusion

#### The Gospel

Our text does a marvelous job of portraying the gospel. We are informed that the gospel begins with God. It is not we who seek God (see [Romans 3:9-18](javascript:%7b%7d)), but it is God who seeks and saves us, opening our hearts to respond to the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf ([Acts 16:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). Salvation is not about the works that we do; salvation is about what the Lord Jesus Christ has done on the cross of Calvary. We are saved by believing on Him, on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are sinners who deserve God’s eternal wrath (hell). God sent Jesus to earth as the Promised Messiah, fulfilling the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. By believing on the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life, we are saved.

#### The Church at Philippi

Let us remember that the church which is founded here in [Acts 16](javascript:%7b%7d) is the church to which Paul has written the Book of Philippians. This is a marvelous church. They were the only church to support Paul financially after Paul departed from Macedonia ([Philippians 4:10-16](javascript:%7b%7d)). They not only sent money to support Paul while he was in prison; they sent Epaphroditus ([Philippians 2:25-30](javascript:%7b%7d)). It is no wonder that the church at Philippi would stand with Paul in his imprisonment in Rome; it was Paul’s imprisonment in Philippi which God used to bring some of them to faith.

#### God’s Strategy

*Paul’s missionary journeys reveal a divine strategy.*We have come far enough in the Book of Acts to realize that there is a strategy behind Paul’s missionary journeys. Paul and his colleagues tend to visit major cities, located on major transportation routes. Paul travels are all within the Roman Empire, and he is a Roman citizen. Thus Paul’s missionary activities fall under the protection of Rome.

We know that Paul follows the practice of going “**to the Jew first**.”

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek ([Romans 1:16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

One can (and should) understand this from a theological point of view. The gospel was to be offered first to the Jews, and then (when rejected) it should be taken to the Gentiles:

45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and they began to contradict what Paul was saying by reviling him. 46 Both Paul and Barnabas replied courageously, “It was necessary to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘*I have appointed you to be a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth* ([Acts 13:45-47](javascript:%7b%7d)).’”

But there is also a practical and strategic dimension to this principle of “**the Jew first**.” This was what made it possible to reach a large number of people and cover a broad geographical area with the gospel. The Jews had been dispersed throughout the known world, and thus Paul sought to reach them first, wherever he traveled. Wherever Paul went, he went first to the synagogue (or, when there was none, to a Jewish place of prayer). The Jews who attended the synagogue believed in one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They read and believed in the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. Thus, they believed the messianic promises and prophecies. Paul could go to a city and, in a short period of time, demonstrate that the Promised Messiah must be rejected, crucified, and then raised from the dead. All that was necessary (as though this was not a miraculous thing – see [2 Corinthians 3](javascript:%7b%7d) and 4) was to show that Jesus was the Promised Messiah. Jesus was the key that unlocked the entire Old Testament.

One need not start at the beginning (where Genesis starts), for the Jews believed these things. One need only go to Christ. And this made it possible for new Jewish converts to mature much more quickly than a raw pagan, whose entire theological system had to be cast aside. No wonder Paul could return so soon to churches he had planted and appoint elders (see [Acts 14:23](javascript:%7b%7d)). Paul could move rather rapidly from one city to the next and leave healthy, thriving churches behind. He would revisit them, of course, and write to them. But he need not remain for great lengths of time. And when he left these churches behind, the work of evangelism among the Gentiles (and Jews) could flourish. Thus, the principle of “**the Jew first**” was a very strategic one, one that greatly advanced the proclamation and progress of the gospel.

#### About Open and Closed Doors

For the near future, our church has chosen to embrace these words from our Lord to the church at Philadelphia:

7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write the following: ‘This is the solemn pronouncement of the Holy One, the True One, who holds the key of David, **who opens doors no one can shut, and shuts doors no one can open**: 8 ‘I know your deeds. (**Look! I have put in front of you an open door that no one can shut.**) I know that you have little strength, but you have obeyed my word and have not denied my name’” ([Revelation 3:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

We desire to recognize the open doors that God has placed before us, and to respond in such a way as to make the most of these opportunities for the preaching of the gospel to the glory of our Savior. If we are to do this, we must be able to recognize those doors that our Lord has opened. I believe that our text instructs us regarding the characteristics of “closed doors” and of “open doors.” Consider the following principles.

*(1) God is the doorkeeper.* He is the One who opens and closes doors. This is clearly stated in [Revelation 3:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d). It is also evident in [Acts 16:6-7](javascript:%7b%7d). It is God (perhaps through His Spirit) who informs us that a door is open or closed. As we see in our text, God may open a door for the gospel in a way that we would never expect (like getting arrested, and being beaten and imprisoned when it is against the law).

*(2) An “opportunity” is not necessarily an open door.*When we speak of open and closed doors, we are referring to hearts that are prepared, and thus are open to the Word of God. An open door is a door that is open to the gospel. When Paul and Silas were in prison, God caused a great earthquake which opened every door and loosed every chain ([Acts 16:26](javascript:%7b%7d)). There was an opportunity for Paul and Silas to escape, but this was not the “open door” God had indicated for Macedonia. The “open door” was the occasion to stay in the prison and to proclaim the gospel to the jailer and his household (and perhaps others in prison). When the magistrates sent the officers to inform the jailer that he could release Paul and Silas, this may have looked like an “open door,” a door through which to escape. But Paul would have none of this. He and Silas stayed in the prison until the magistrates came and apologized. Paul’s concern was for the advance of the gospel and for the well-being of the church. Thus he stayed until those responsible acknowledged their failure to administrate justice.

*(3) One can only know a closed door by first trying it.* Have you ever had a boy or a girl come to your door and ask, “You don’t want to buy any cookies, do you?” Some Christians conclude that a door is closed before they have even tried to open it. Paul and Silas attempted to go to Asia, and then to Bithynia. They learned that God had closed the door when they tried to open it. *We discern God’s direction by attempting to fulfill our calling, and thus we will know when a door is truly closed.* Many Christians excuse their inaction by calling it a closed door, but they have never tried to enter it.

*(4) An open door may only become evident after one has experienced some closed doors.* It was not until after God had closed two doors that God revealed Macedonia as an open door. Some people are tempted to give up at the first closed door. God expects us to persevere until the open door is made known to us.

*(5) Opposition is not necessarily an indication of a closed door:*

1 The same thing happened in Iconium when Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a large group of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 **So they stayed there for a considerable time, speaking out courageously for the Lord, who testified to the message of his grace, granting miraculous signs and wonders to be performed through their hands** ([Acts 14:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

5 Now when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. 6 When they opposed him and reviled him, he protested by shaking out his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am guiltless! From now on I will go to the Gentiles!“ 7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went to the house of a person named Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the president of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household, and many of the Corinthians who heard about it believed and were baptized. 9 The Lord said to Paul by a vision in the night, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, 10 because I am with you, and no one will assault you to harm you, because I have many people in this city.“ 11 So he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them ([Acts 18:5-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I have heard John Piper say something like this:[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P116_45394) “There is no closed door for anyone who is willing to die for their faith.” I agree with what I understand Piper to be saying. Some people interpret opposition or difficulties as an indication of a closed door. Therefore, if preaching about Jesus looks dangerous, we assume that it is a closed door and we move on (to safer places and people). The Scriptures make it very clear that Christians will suffer for their faith.[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P117_45881) There are some doors that God has closed, perhaps to open at a later time. But let us not assume that opposition, danger, or suffering are absolute evidence that God has closed the door. The Philippian jailer and his household were an open door, but it cost Paul and Silas dearly to seize this opportunity for the gospel.

*(6) Our suffering may actually open a door of opportunity for the gospel.*The suffering of our Lord on the cross of Calvary certainly “opened the door of salvation.” So, too, it may be our suffering (unjust suffering, that is) that opens the door for evangelism. The suffering of Paul and Silas opened the door for evangelizing the Philippian jailer and his household. Paul could write the Philippians that his circumstances (read, sufferings) promoted the gospel ([Philippians 1:12](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.). Peter says something similar:

14 But in fact, if you happen to suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. ***But do not be terrified of them*** ***or be shaken****.* 15 But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess ([1 Peter 3:14-15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I often hear Christians praying that they, or their fellow believers, might be delivered from sickness, pain, and suffering. I understand. I’ve prayed the same things myself, many times. But should we not be careful when we do so? Should we not rather pray that God would be glorified, and that sinners might be drawn to faith in Jesus, whether through our sufferings or through our deliverance? Should we not ask God to give us the grace and hope we need in times of suffering, so that we will stand apart from the lost, who have no hope? When suffering unavoidably comes our way, let us look for open doors that are created by suffering in a godly way:

18 Slaves, be subject to your masters with all reverence, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are perverse. 19 For this finds God’s favor, if because of conscience toward God someone endures hardships in suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if you sin and are mistreated and endure it? But if you do good and suffer and so endure, this finds favor with God. 21 For to this you were called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps. 22 He ***committed no*** sin ***nor was deceit found in his mouth***. 23 When he was maligned, he did not answer back; when he suffered, he threatened no retaliation, but committed himself to God who judges justly. 24 He ***himself bore our sins*** in his body on the tree, that we may cease from sinning and live for righteousness. ***By*** his ***wounds*** ***you were healed***. 25 For you were ***going astray like sheep*** but now you have turned back to the shepherd and guardian of your souls ([1 Peter 2:18-25](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When suffering leads to salvation, it is an open door.

*(7) Closed doors may only be closed temporarily.*We have recently seen how the Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his associates from preaching the Word in Asia ([Acts 16:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). Before long, Paul and Silas will come to Ephesus, where they will proclaim the Word for at least two years, impacting all Asia:

8 So Paul entered the synagogue and spoke out fearlessly for three months, addressing and convincing them about the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were stubborn and refused to believe, reviling the Way before the congregation, he left them and took the disciples with him, addressing them every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, **so that all who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord** ([Acts 19:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Likewise, the Spirit did not permit them to enter Bithynia, but we know that God eventually did bring the gospel to these people:

1 From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those temporarily residing abroad (in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia) who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by being set apart by the Spirit for obedience and for sprinkling with Jesus Christ’s blood. May grace and peace be yours in full measure! ([1 Peter 1:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d))

*(8) An open door leads to open hearts.* God had temporarily closed the door to Asia, and to Bithynia, but He opened the door in Macedonia. We are thus not surprised to read that God was opening hearts to the gospel that was proclaimed:

13 On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there. 14 A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a God-fearing woman, listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying ([Acts 16:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I greatly appreciate what Colin McDougall of Church of the Open Door shared with our church some time ago. He said that when his family moved from a remote area in Africa to Southern California, he concluded that his efforts should be focused on prayer. He would pray that God would open the hearts of people around him, and that He would reveal those people to him. Open hearts are an open door. We need to pray much that God would prepare the hearts of those whom we encounter, and that we would have the sensitivity to recognize these open doors and take advantage of them.

May God grant us open doors of opportunity, so that the gospel may be proclaimed and lost sinners may be saved. May God grant us the perseverance to find those open doors, and the faith to enter them, by His grace and to His glory.

[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P10_797) I am citing these earlier verses in [Acts 16](javascript:%7b%7d) because they provide essential background for our lesson.

[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P15_5046) Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection will be able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the Internet at: [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P17_5950) Copyright © 2006 by Community Bible Chapel, 418 E. Main Street, Richardson, TX 75081. This is the edited manuscript of Lesson 23 in the *Studies in the Book of Acts* series prepared by Robert L. Deffinbaugh on May 7, 2006. Anyone is at liberty to use this lesson for educational purposes only, with or without credit. The Chapel believes the material presented herein to be true to the teaching of Scripture, and desires to further, not restrict, its potential use as an aid in the study of God’s Word. The publication of this material is a grace ministry of Community Bible Chapel.

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P20_7736) I can’t help but wonder what this “**Macedonian man**” looked like. Did he look like the jailer?

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P23_8691) We know that there were those in the households of both Lydia and the jailer who came to faith in Jesus as well.

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P32_12176) The NET Bible, along with most other translations, renders this term “**met**,” but I believe this is too neutral a translation. This term often means “to oppose.” Luke uses this term twice in his Gospel ([Luke 8:27; 14:31](javascript:%7b%7d)), and in both instances the encounter is hostile. This slave girl was on the attack, as I understand the text.

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P37_13248) James Montgomery Boice, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), p. 279.

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P52_19438) This was not the only time Paul suffered such a beating (see [2 Corinthians 11:25](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P54_19607) [Acts 16:35-40; 22:22-29](javascript:%7b%7d).

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P55_19722) [Acts 22:22-29](javascript:%7b%7d).

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P116_45395) I confess that I cannot cite a specific reference here.

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/23-closer-look-open-and-closed-doors-acts-1611-40" \l "P117_45882) See [Acts 14:21-22](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Corinthians 11:23-29](javascript:%7b%7d); [Philippians 1:29](javascript:%7b%7d); [2 Timothy 3:12](javascript:%7b%7d).

## The Cry of The Heathen

April 25, 1858  
**C. H. SPURGEON** at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0189.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0189.htm)

**"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." - Acts 16:9.**

This was no doubt a special vision sent of God for the direction of the apostle. For we are told in the next verse, that they assuredly gathered from this vision, that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel in Macedonia. And yet the vision may be very readily accounted for by natural causes. Men usually dream of that which is most upon their minds. Who would marvel that the miser should, in his restless sleep, be pictured to his own sight as counting over his gold? Who wonders that the mother's dream is often concerning her fair infant? Who marvels that the wife frequently dreams of shipwrecks, when, in the stormy night, she lies upon her bed, her last thoughts having been exercised concerning her husband at sea? You wonder not that the soldier in the trenches dreams of battle. And hence we cannot marvel that the apostle Paul, whose whole soul was full of his Master's cause, should have a vision in the night concerning a new field of labor, which God had intended to open up to him. You will remember that the apostle was, on this occasion, in a peculiar condition. He at first endeavored to preach the gospel in Phrygia and Galatia, but he was forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia. And "after they had come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not." The apostle was like Abraham of old; he went forth, not knowing whither he went. There was a certain path which he must take, and when he strove to turn either to the right hand or to the left, the Spirit directly forbade him, and he was compelled to go on till he came to the sea-port of Troas. There, wearied with his journey, he cast himself upon his couch, and in the midst of the night a vision appeared unto him. A man who by his brogue and his dress was discovered to be a Macedonian, said to him, "Come over and help us." God sometimes tells men in their sleep the secret they could not discover when they were awake. We have heard of the preacher who, tired late on Saturday evening, has been unable to think of a discourse, in the middle of the night has dreamed it through, and on the morrow he ascended his pulpit and preached it. What wonder then, that the apostle Paul, specially directed by the Spirit of God, after an day long wearily exercising his mind an to the journey God intended him to take, should, after all, when in his sleep, have a vision from on high, teaching him where he should go.  
  
And now, beloved, having thus prefaced our discourse, we have another observation to make before we proceed to a full discussion of the text. What an instance of Divine sovereignty we have in our text! He who is wise can see sovereignty everywhere in the work of salvation, but how clearly is it present here. Bithynia must not hear the gospel; the apostle desires to go and preach it there; but as yet, it seems, God does not intend that Bithynia should be evangelised. He desires to tarry in Asia, and there throughout its length and breadth preach the gospel; but he is strictly forbidden, and the command comes to him that he is to go across to Europe, and there proclaim the gospel. Was not this sovereignty? Why was it that God shut the door in Bithynia, and opened it in Philippi! Was it that Philippi was more worthy, or that Bithynia needed it less? Assuredly not. It was of God's mercy that he sent the gospel at any time, and when he sent to Philippi the most eminent of apostles to preach it, who shall blame him? Has he not a right to do what he wills with his own? But we may rest quite assured, that his sovereignty was not an arbitrary exercise of despotic will. It was a sovereignty dictated by the highest wisdom; for while God rules all things according to his own will, yet we are expressly told, that he doeth it according to the counsels of his will, his will being no blind headstrong thing, willing for no reason whatever, but being always subject to his own sense of that which is the wisest, and which will promote his glory and his creature's profit. However, we must still observe, Divine sovereignty is that which casts a rich lustre upon grace, when we recollect that it is sovereign and free. Oh ye, of the race of Britain! bless the Lord, that he hath sent the gospel unto you; for while doubtless there is wisdom in it, remember there is also sovereignty in it. "He hath not dealt so with any nation. Praise ye the Lord." Had he willed it, had he seen fit, the gospel had this day been flourishing in the center of Africa, and you might at this moment have been destitute of the word of the gospel, living barbarians like your fathers, embruing your hands in blood. Unto the great, dread Sovereign, who ruleth as he wills on earth as in heaven, be glory for ever and ever.  
  
And now we turn to our text. "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." First, we shall observe, that *the best help that can be rendered to any people is the preaching of the gospel.* "Come over and help us," that is, preach to us. Secondly, we shall notice that *although we have no visions or dreary in the night, yet, the nations on the earth are calling to the church of the living God, and are saying to us, "Come over to us, and help us."* And then, thirdly, I shall conclude, by solemnly asking the question, *what do you who love the Lord intend to say to those, who are now asking at your hands the help of a preached gospel?*  
 **I. First, then, THE GREATEST HELP THAT CAN BE GIVEN TO ANY PEOPLE, IS THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, and when I say this, I am uttering a truth which I need not guard.**

The gospel is a help, not in one way, but in every way. Those who have not the gospel stand in the greatest need of help; but when the gospel is carried, you carry everything within it. In the folds of the gospel sleepeth the manifold wisdom of God, and his manifold goodness also toward the sons of men. Behold, the nations of the earth this day are still the bond-slaves of tyrants - many lands are still subject to despotic dynasties, who trample men beneath their feet, as if men were but earthen pitchers to be broken in pieces by the iron wills of kings. How is liberty to be established in these lands? Shall the point of the bayonet bring liberty to these nations that still are slaves? Never, never. Iron makes our fetters, iron rivets them, but iron never can unloose them. We need something more potent than steel to carve out the liberty of mankind. Love, love of the Gospel, must be the ground work of liberty, and if *liberty, equality,* and *fraternity,* the three great words that are the world's heir loom, are ever to be fully known and realised, it must be by the preaching of the Word of Jesus. The preaching of the gospel is the terror of despots. If you ask what makes this land free, every candid man must say it is the open gospel and the unfettered preaching of the Word. Glasgow's motto is, "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word." It is the coat of arms of liberty herself. Liberty flourishes by the preaching of the Word of God. Certain it is that wherever you find Protestantism, you find liberty, and wherever you leave Protestantism behind you, you begin to feel the yoke, and to hear the groans of the oppressed. It is true that Protestantism doth not in every place produce perfect liberty, because it is not sufficiently true to itself. There are still places where the slave feels the lash, while his master calls himself a Christian; but this is not the legitimate effect of our religion, but rather the effect of a delusion which hell itself did first invent, and which nought but the deep depravity of men could ever permit to stand before the face of God's sun. Yes, ye tyrants on your thrones, the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands shall yet break you in pieces! O great statue of tyranny with thy head of gold, and thy feet of clay, thou shalt yet totter, for this shall break thee in pieces, for the breaker is come out before us, and the king at the head of us, and who can withstand his might? What shall hold out against the mighty principle wherewith Christ makes men free?  
  
Look, brethren, too, and see how the nations of the earth are lying under gloomy superstition. Perhaps there is one thing in the world worse than kingcraft, and that is priestcraft. May God save us from two things - from tyrannical kings, and from priests of all sorts. Priests of any sort are bad, but superstitious priests are the worst of all. Oh, how many nations of the earth have their intellect blighted, their hopes blasted, their progress shipped, their whole history eclipsed of its glory, their state robbed of its riches, by the cursed dominancy of priests. Men are compelled to believe just what the priest chooses. Because he wears a cassock; because he has been educated in the deep mysteries of craftiness, he is to be lord over men's consciences, and consciences and hearts are to bow before him; wherever he comes his word is to be law, his will is to open and shut the gates of heaven, for he pretends that the keys of heaven and of hades are hanging at his girdle. How shall we deliver men from these enthralling superstitions! No how, but by the preaching of the gospel. You cannot make men free, even by governments; you cannot give them a thorough freedom by giving them a republic itself; for that republic must fall so long as priestcraft is there, for liberty and priestcraft agree as well together as God and devil, and no better; and until the one falls the other can never stand.  
  
But the preaching of the gospel which teaches that believers are all priests and kings; which lifts every one of us into the high places of princes and monarchs and puts every one of us on a level with pontiffs and priests - this is the gospel which shall yet set men free, and the preaching of this, and this only, is the world's great and grandest hope of its deliverance from the slavery of the body and the yet more accursed bondage of the soul.  
  
But, beloved, there are some nations of the earth that have never as yet tasted of the sweets of salvation. Large tracts of country have been discovered, where the people are still debased and degraded; the kraal of the Hottentot has not yet blossomed into a mansion, the spear of the New Zealander has not yet been entirely changed for a pruning hook. There are many places where all the joys of life and the social comforts and enjoyments of our being, are as yet totally unknown. Now, the gospel has blessings in both its hands. Wherever it goes it has the blessings heaven, rich and golden - it has the blessing of the earth, fair and silvery. They are both precious things, and while we believe the gospel is ordained most of all to bless man for the hereafter, yet the secularist himself, if he were wise, must take some interest in the progress of the gospel, for it is a blessing to men even ill this life. The great civilizer is the cross. Nothing else can make the barbarian into a civilized man, but the cross and the vision of Christ hanging on it. Blessed are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of peace, for where they bring the glad tidings of peace with God, they bring also good news of goodwill towards men, - even goodwill towards men as creatures here, as well as good news to them as creatures that are to exist for ever. My dear brethren and sisters, if you would bless the world, in the largest possible sense, temporarily, spiritually, and eternally; if you would bless the bodies and the souls of men, if you would bless men in their children, in their houses, if you would bless them in their meats and drinks and in all the necessities of life, the one simple means of doing all this, is just the proclamation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that fully preached and received, has been proved in instances which I need not now stop to recall to your memories - instances abundant and recent, to be after all, the power of God, not only to salvation but to civilization too.  
  
There is yet one more point which I must mention here in which the gospel is the best help to man. We must remember to-day, that there are districts of the earth where the ground is yet red with blood. There are sad portions of our globe that as yet must have the name of Aceldama, the field of gore, there are spots where the horse-hoof is splashed with blood; where the very carcasses of men are the food of ravens and of jackalls, the mounds of Balaclava are as yet scarcely green, and the spots where rest the relics of our own murdered sisters and brothers are not covered with the memorial stone. War has ravaged whole districts; even in these late times the dogs of war are not yet muzzled. Oh! what shall we do to put an end to war? Mars, where is the chain that shall bind thee like Prometheus, to the rock? How shall we imprison thee for ever, thou cruel Moloch; how shall we for ever chain thee? Behold here is the great chain, that which one day is to bind the great serpent; it has the blood-red links of love. The gospel of Jesus Christ the crucified one, shall yet hush the clarion of war, and break the battle-bow in sunder.  
  
Happy are we, thrice happy, that we have a gospel which shall make men

"Hang the useless helmet high, // And study war no more."

Let us spread it, then, to earth's utmost bounds; for, to repeat the text I quoted just now, it hath blessings in both its hands, wherever it goes temporarily as well as eternally, it blesses the human race. And when it shall have spread to its utmost limits, when all the habitable earth shall be covered with it then the mist that swathes our planet shall be rolled away, and bright, like a new-born morning star, this earth shall shine out with her sister stars in all her glory, and the angels shall once more sing, and God himself shall repeat his verdict - "all things are very good."  
  
But still, beloved, the greatest help that the gospel brings is help to the soul. Ah, Christian men, ye know what this means: your brothers and sisters are this day wandering blindfold, they know not whither. Ye know, for the Bible tells you that they are wending their weary way down to the gulf of black despair! Oh does not your heart desire that the blind eye should be opened, that the misguided should be directed on the path to heaven: would not your pity desire to snatch the fire brand from the flame? Do you not anxiously seek to know how you can lead the vicious to virtue, and the virtuous to the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ? Have you no desire to see God's elect ingathered, to see them washed, and sanctified, and perfected? Remember this is to be, and since it is to be it is certain that ye must send the gospel far and wide, for by no other means can God's elect be gathered home. How can they believe without a preacher? How can they preach except they be sent? The gospel must go throughout all lands, that the elect may be gathered home, and the Messiah's kingdom come. Oh! ye who love the souls of men, it is to you an awful thought that hell's caverns are filling; it is a dreary thing to you to see the broad road so crowded with its many travelers? You are longing and wishing that the narrow way might have more pilgrims, I beseech you, then, look to it, that by every mean. and by all means ye aid the preaching of the gospel of Jesus; for it is the help for which the earth calls, and the help which you must render to it. Come over and help us by preaching Christ's holy gospel. Thus have I done with the first head, may the Lord help us in the second.  
  
**II. The second point is, that although not in visions of the night, yet EVERY DAY AND EVERY HOUR, THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH ARE SAYING, "COME OVER AND HELP US."**

Do you not know, that the loudest eloquence is silence? To move the heart of the right-minded, ye need not the declamation of the orator. The sight of silent, dumb misery is the highest eloquence to a tender heart. It is true, I must confess it the nations of the earth do not vocally ask for your help; nay, worse than that, if you send them the help of the gospel they will many of them reject it. Your missionaries have been slain, - the altars of false gods have been stained with their blood; but still I solemnly repeat it the nations of the earth are silently crying, "Come over and help us." If I say; a person in the street sick, faint, and dying, although he spoke not to me, though he asked me not to befriend him, I should think the weakness of his silence more potent than all the power of words. Ay, and if I saw him like a maniac, rejecting my help and pushing me from him, if I was convinced that he was really a maniac, for that very reason that he needed my help, I would thrust my alms upon him, I would willingly give him my help and assistance, and so must you do. The nations of the earth are dead in sin; how can they cry to you? But it is yours to see their misery; and let the poor, poor dumb wounds of this bleeding earth speak to you. It is true, earth is a maniac, and it puts away the only cure. But what care we for that? It is ours to thrust our kindness upon unwilling men, because we believe that their unwillingness arises from the madness of their disease. Let us take the poor man that has fallen among thieves. Let us pour in the oil and the wine, and if he doth not receive it gratefully, because he is faint, if he putteth his hand upon the wound, and rends away the liniment, and unbinds the plaster, nevertheless. let us bind him up again, and set him upon our own beast, and carry him to the inn. Let us pay for the lodging even though as yet he cannot speak to thank us; and the day shall come, when the wound is healed, and the burning fever is removed, when his brain is cool, and his reason restored, that he shall fall at our feet and kiss the hand that once he spurned. Unborn generations shall bless the men that sent the gospel, which at first their fathers did reject.  
  
And now, brethren and sisters, let me plead the cause of the dumb. No man of Macedonia is here to-day to say "Come over and help us," but let me be the heathen's spokesman, and very earnestly ask you to come and help him. Methinks, I will stand here as a heathen this morning, and I say to you as if I had not heard the gospel. "Ye Christians of Britain! ye highly favored ones, who know the name of Jesus and prove the power of the Spirit, preach the gospel to us, for we are men like yourselves. What though our skin be of a color less fair than your own? Yet he fashioneth our hearts alike. Oh tell us not, because we feed on the locust, and eat the serpent, that therefore we are not of your kith and kind! 'Not that which goeth into a man defileth a man.' It is true, our kings and princes are only fit to rank with your beggars; but oh! God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth; and from our huts and cabins we come forth to-day, and we say to you, 'We are men - we are your brothers - younger brothers, it is true - we have not had a double portion of the inheritance, brothers, too, whose fathers spent their part in riotous living, but why should the children's teeth be set on edge because the fathers have eaten sour grapes? Why must the son of man for ever bear the curse of Canaan? O preach the gospel to us! We are men, mother Eve is our mother, as well as yours; Adam, too, is the father from whose loins we sprang; and because we are men, the common sympathy of humanity bids you listen to us, when we say, 'Come over and help us.' Besides, we have another argument. We are told that 'unto you is the Word of this salvation sent,' not for yourselves, but for us, brothers, who have not heard the gospel and who know it not. And you have the treasure in your own land; and we believe you have the treasure given to you, that you may lavish handfuls of it out to us. We know that old Judea had the covenant and the oracles, and the gospel to keep for coming generations; and we believe that you men of Britain have the gospel, not for yourselves, but for us. We have heard what your Master said, 'Ye are the lights of the world;' not lights of Britain, not lights for yourselves, the lights of the world. Oh! bear your burning torches into the glades of our dark forests. come and shed your light through the dark mists of our idolatrous temples; let the bats of our superstition, and the owls of our ignorance, fly away before the sunlight of your gospel. It is not for yourselves you have received it, but for us. Oh! give it to us. Preach the gospel to us, for it is designed for us. But we have another argument, brethren; look at our miseries!"  
  
As the spokesman for my poor brethren to-day, I stand before you, and I remind you of the tortures to which the poor Hindoo devotee puts himself; I remind you of the cruelties enacted in the Chinese empire - the horrors of a government that is based upon idolatry. I tell you of the distress, the destitution, the poverty, the nakedness, the misery, of the Bechuanas and the Bushmen, and I speak for these, and I say, "Christians, you have the means of alleviating their woes by sending them the gospel; will you not do it?" Look at the dwellers in the land of the jungle and the lion. There they are; the serpent has grasped them in his folds, and like the boa-constrictor of their own forests, he is crushing their nations, until the ribs of the strong man snap, and the hearts of the women melt like wax. And you have the sword in your hands that can cut the serpent's head! Your Master bruised that head beneath his heel, and you must do the same. Oh! come, come, ye missionaries of the cross, ye ministers of Jesus, come and deliver us from this deadly hydra! Save us from our fearful doom! Our miseries invoke your aid. It is true, we cannot speak to you in gentle language, but there was a time when poets walked amongst us, and some of the light that shone in Paradise, yet gilded our darkness. and we treasured up a few of those faint rays, and we are hoping that the sun of righteousness will yet dawn upon us. Oh! come, roll away those mists; come, chase our night. and let us see that sacred, high, eternal noon, which is the daughter of the gospel following the Sun of Righteousness.  
  
And now, Christian men, let me speak to you as one of yourselves. Brethren, you and I are soldiers, soldiers of the cross, and at this hour worlds are rushing to the shock. The fight is thickening, and we are warriors! Shame upon the craven who stays from the battle. The trump is sounding to-day. Mohammed has waked from his sleep; the Moslem, with bloody hands, has sought to slay our race; the Hindoo, too, the meek-eyed Hindoo, his eyes have glared like the eyes of his tiger, and his lips have smacked with gore. The battle is raging. Not there alone. Popery hath aroused itself, with mighty effort it is endeavoring to win back this gem of the sea, this first isle of the ocean. Infidelity, too, is on the stir; her myrmidons are flying here and there. Everything is awake, except the church of God. Oh! rouse ye, men and brethren; rouse, now that the fight is at its fullest fury. Now is the time for our most desperate velour, our most earnest zeal. Recollect, every time you bow your knees, and say, "Our Father," you tell a lie at the end of that prayer, if you are not seeking to make his kingdom come, and his will be done in earth, as it is heaven. You are praying for what you do not try to get; you are insulting God by saying, "Thy kingdom come," with as foul a mockery, as if I should say, "Be warmed and be filled," to some poor dying beggar, and then refused to give to his needs, that he might remove his distresses.  
  
Recollect, too, that you cannot be Christians at all, not in the right sense of the word, unless you everyone of you would compass sea and land to make one proselyte. You must have in you the spirit of propagathm, desirous to will others to Christ, or else the genuine blood of Christianity is not in your veins. Of all things in the world Christianity is the most prolific, if it be true. Mohammedism of old had mighty power to spread itself, but not such power as Christianity had. The religion of Jesus began like a mustard seed, with those few men in an upper-room; but ere a half century had rolled away, the gospel was preached to every nation under heaven, and if we had Christianity in our hearts of the right sort - hot, burning stuff, not the lukewarm shams of this degenerate age, our religion ere another half a century will have won the day. If the Spirit of God should give us true diligence, in the course of another half century there would not be one district that would not have been trodden by the foot of the minister, nor one town or city which would not have been evangelized. I know I am not speaking without book now I am absolutely certain that what I am saying is a sober matter of fact. If you will just calculate the proportion between the four hundred, and the progress made in one half a century, and then begin with the three or four millions - I should hope there are as many as that - of true Christians in the world, I say, it is a little thing to believe that if they were true to their profession, they might, under Divine blessing, carry the gospel into every known part of the habitable world before half a century has rolled away. However, we need not be afraid we shall do it. There is no fear that we shall run into any fanaticism. That is the last sin this age will commit. We shall go on, and be as orthodox and cold as we always were. No enthusiasm will ever fall upon us. We shall not see any very great and strange developments of an enormous fanaticism at the present day. Do not be alarmed, brothers and sisters. All I preach that looks like fanaticism will not hurt this age. Ye may do what ye will; preach ye never so wisely, ye will never make this deaf adder hear. The church of this day is a great deal too deaf to do anything extravagant. We do a little, and think it a wonderful deal. We each give fourpence to send Testaments to China; we will talk of it for the next fifty years! We sent out one or two missionaries to India (and are they not one or two, compared with their needs?) it is a great thing. It is a fine thing for the whole Baptist denomination to raise twenty thousand pounds a year, when there are some men in the denomination who make as much money as that in the time. It is a marvellous thing that out of the whole lot of us we should not be able to get more than that. But you know I am an imprudent young man, of course, - I always shall be I dare say - to dare to hint that some people have a great deal too much money to go to heaven with. Of course it will be very wicked if I dare to say this morning, that to die rich is a very frightful thing; that there are some people who have got too much riches to allow us to have any sure and certain hope that they have the love of God at all; for if they had more of the love of God, they would not grip their money so tightly. They would say, "While men are damning, what is my money? While men are dying, what is my gold? There it goes! As much as I need, I have, God allows it me; as much as I shall require in my old age, as much as my family can demand of me, that will I have, but as for more, a blast and a curse would be on it if I had it. My gold and my silver would be cankered, for I should be guilty of the blood of men's souls, and then condemnation would be at my door, because I had the money wherewithal to send the minister to preach to them, and I would not give it."  
  
Now, I say again, there is no fear of any one becoming improvidently liberal. You need not be frightened that anyone here will give a thousand pounds this morning. We provide ample accommodation for those who feel inclined to do so. If anyone should be overtaken with such an enormous fit of generosity, we will register and remember it. But I fear there are no people like Barnabas now. Barnabas brought all he had, and put it into the treasury. "My dear friend, do not do that, do not be so rash." Ah! he will not do that; there is no necessity for you to advise him. But I do say again, if Christianity were truly in our hearts; if we were what we professed to be; the men of generosity whom we meet with now and hold up as very paragons and patterns would cease to be wonders, for they would be as plentiful as leaves upon the trees. We demand of no man that he should beggar himself; but we do demand of every man who makes a profession that he is a Christian, that he should give his fair proportion, and not be content with giving as much to the cause of God as his own servant. We must have it that the man who is rich must give richly. We know the widow's mite is precious, but the widow's mite has been an enormously great loss to us. O, that widow's mite has lost Jesus Christ many a thousand pounds. It is a very good thing in itself; but people with thousands a-year talk of giving a widow's mite. What a wicked application of what never can apply to them. No; in our proportion we must serve our God.  
  
**III. Now, I come in conclusion to ask you very pointedly and plainly, WHAT DO YOU MEAN TO DO IN ANSWER TO THE HEATHEN'S CRY, "COME OVER AND HELP US?"**

Have I in all this congregation one man who loves sound doctrine, who has ability to preach, and who has a mind to go and preach the gospel in other lands? Because if I have, and if I have ten others who have a mind to give him ten pounds a year, I have an opening for sending him out at once. In Port Natal there are twenty Baptists, and those twenty Baptists are desirous of having a minister who should not only preach to them, but to the wild tribes around. They will raise him one hundred pounds, if we can manage to get the rest and send them out a missionary. Who can tell; he might be another Livingstone, perhaps a Moffat? Oh, that I had the honor of sending such an one from such a congregation as this! Have we no young men here this morning, who are ready to volunteer to go and preach the gospel in heathen lands? I confess, when I think of myself, I know I cannot go away. My calling is here. And yet I sometimes think what a lazy, feather-bed life it is for one to lead, to be preaching here when there are all these continents without the gospel. Some people think it wonderfully hard to preach two or three sermons a week. but I think preaching thirteen or fourteen is a fearfully little thing. And I think sometimes, "Oh, if I were somewhere rise, where there are some toils, some hardships to undergo! There is nothing to be done here. We cannot suffer, we cannot work, we cannot will crowns of martyrdom, we cannot will great battles here, as we could wish." Yes, young man, I say again, if you are ambitious - if you are ambitious to serve Christ, the height of your ambition should lead you to say, "I desire to preach the gospel among the heathen." I hope there may be come here - some one at least - whose heart God hath touched. What! can it be possible that I should this morning address some eight thousand people, and yet out of the whole eight thousand there is not one who can say, "Here am I, send me?" Is it not strange? Very probably there is not. But yet I would fain hope that somewhere there is one, who will write on the tablet of his heart, "I will go home to pray, I will go home to study, and if God has given me power to preach, if there be any door open in his providence, here am I; I will be a preacher of the gospel in foreign lands."  
  
And now, what are *you* resolved to do who cannot preach? Why, there are some of you, if you were to get up and preach, you had a great deal better sit down. It would not do for you to go and preach in foreign lands, because nobody would listen to you. I have often marvelled that some people should think themselves called to preach when they have no ability. As I tell them, "f God calls anybody to fly, he will give them wings, and if he calls them to preach, he will give them ability to preach." but if a man has not the ability to preach, I am sure he has not the call. Well, what will you do Says one, "I will pray earnestly in support of missions; I will cry to God, that great results may follow." Do so; and you shall have our best thanks for your prayers. But in doing that, you have not done very much. for recollect, that is what the Roman priest did for the beggar. The priest said he would not give him a sovereign, he would not give him a half-crown, nor would he give him a penny. "Holy father," said the beggar, "will you give me your prayers?" "Yes," said the priest, "kneel down." "No, not so," said the beggar; "for if your prayers had been worth a penny, you would not have given them to me." And when you say you will pray, but will not help the cause with something more substantial; though we love your prayers, we night say, "You would not give them if they were worth a penny." If you have nought else to give to Christ, ye need not be ashamed of saying, "Jesus, I give thee my prayers;" but if you are blessed in your substance, you will be lying before him, if you ask him to bless his cause, and do not give of your means in its support.  
  
Now, let each, as he is able, help this great cause; and above all let us all in our spheres be preachers of the gospel,

"Seeking to tell to others round // What a dear Saviour we have found."

Let me say, before the collection is made, just this word. Alas! there are some of you here, that are as much heathen as if you were in Africa. To you I proclaim the gospel, and I have done - "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, find thou shalt be saved." Amen.  
  
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