

Acts 16.1-15—God’s Mission to Strengthen and to Save His Sheep

- I. Introduction
 - a. The story of buying our house.
- II. Main Point
 - a. God is on mission to strengthen disciples to be his witnesses who shine the light of the gospel through the church to save his lost sheep.
- III. Outline
 - a. Compelled to go
 - b. Keeping it going by Identifying and training young leaders
 - c. Strengthening and making disciples is the job of the church
 - d. The God who closes doors and opens hearts
- IV. Exposition
 - a. Really all the points have some dependence on this first one—going. I don’t mean to say the mission of God is dependent on anything other than God. But Jesus uses means to accomplish the mission even though he could do it completely without us.
 - i. As I was working through this text, I noticed how often we see “going” in some form from beginning to end. Indeed, the great commission states clearly that to obey the command to make disciples of all nations involves going.
 - ii. I suppose this is an overly simply point to make. Yet, the mission of God is designed for disciples to go make other disciples.
 1. It is modeled after God sending his Son into the world to save sinners.
 - a. Jesus prayed this in (Jn. 17:18) ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.
 2. This important part of going also involves sending.
 - iii. I think it’s obvious that to obey the great commission we must be going and/or sending. But what compels us to go and give?
 1. Let’s take note of what Paul and Barnabas had in mind when they decided to go back.
 - a. (Acts 15:36) ³⁶ And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."
 - b. What compels them to want to see how they are? What compels them to return to the place where Paul was nearly stoned to death? What compels a man to put himself in such an uncomfortable way of life?
 - c. Love. Being loved by God compels us...shows us...leads us to do what the world might call crazy.
 - d. If we were to look at our lives and see what we are willing to do for the people and things we love that will not scratch the surface of God’s love towards us. But it would give us a picture of how love compels us to do crazy things.
 - e. Listen to Paul say this and ask what compels him to desire this: (Rom. 9:1-3) I am speaking the truth in Christ-- I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
 - f. He will say in (Rom. 10:1) Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
 2. This is a supernatural act of God in us. And it is our response to that work of grace to be in awe of what he has done for someone so undeserving as ourselves.

- a. Do you have a passion for God's glory?
 - i. Will you go?
 - ii. Will you send?
 - iii. Will you give?
 - iv. Will you pray?
- b. While going is very important to the mission of God, the next point is extremely important as well—identifying and training young leaders to carry on the mission of God is to keep the working going.
 - i. As they travel to Lystra and Derbe, they encounter a certain disciple named Timothy.
 1. And yes, this is the same Timothy to which Paul writes his pastoral letters to later.
 2. Luke describes Timothy's background because we will need this to make sense of why Paul circumcises him.
 - a. As we already know, his mom was a Jewish believer but his father was a Greek.
 - i. I can't help but remind you of last week's message where we talked about Timothy's mother and grandmother pouring the scriptures into his soul to make him wise for salvation.
 - ii. More than likely, they both came to faith during Paul and Barnabus' first missionary journey. And he often refers to Timothy as his son in the faith.
 - iii. God uses people from divided homes and broken homes. He uses people whose father may have abandoned him and gives him another father in Paul.
 - iv. Timothy will be doing what his mom and grandmother and Paul did for him very soon.
 - b. Since he probably lead them to faith, Paul might have been looking for this young man to train. We discover that Paul wants Timothy to accompany him.
 - i. This seems to be in part because as it says in verse 2 that he was well spoken of by the brothers in both Lystra and Derbe.
 - ii. This is the same word used for those first deacons in Acts 6—men of good repute.
 - iii. And it's a summary of what he will later describe as the qualifications for pastors and deacons.
 - iv. I think since we are so fresh off of the dispute between Paul and Barnabus over Mark that we might wonder why he didn't just do this with him.
 1. In part, he wasn't well spoken of because he abandoned the team.
 - v. And maybe Barnabus' example changed Paul's mind. Whatever the case, there are multiple young leaders being trained and two teams going to check on those disciples from the first journey.
 3. If I can speak frankly about this once again, this must be on our radar. No one gets younger.
 - a. The going and ongoing of the mission of God involves identifying and training leaders. They must step up.
 - b. Ministry is hard. Decisions aren't easy. No one should do this alone.
 - c. Even the seemingly complex decision to circumcise Timothy isn't an easy decision.

- i. We just left Acts 15 where they battled it out over circumcision being necessary for salvation. Obviously, they concluded it wasn't necessary so why is Paul doing this to Timothy.
 - ii. Well, necessary for salvation and necessary for ministry are two different things.
 - iii. We all should be sensitive to things that might shut doors unnecessarily.
 - iv. I have preached in places that had different expectations. Recently, I was speaking with someone who was vegan and I was wearing camouflage after going hunting. It didn't seem to bother them but if I had known I would have intentionally not worn or talk about those things.
 - v. If I were sharing the gospel with Muslims and we had them over for dinner I wouldn't serve them things they believe to be unclean.
 - d. That's why training is so important. The ongoing of God's mission needs to make leadership development a priority.
 - i. I would love to host a small pastors' conferences here.
 - ii. I'd love to have an intern in training.
 - iii. I'd love to have a men's and women's retreat each year to emphasize these things.
 - iv. I obviously think we should have more lay pastors.
 - v. I'd love to take someone or a group on a mission trip.
- c. That leads us nicely into our next point—strengthening and making disciples is the job of the church.
 - i. Imagine if I started my own business of making and selling automotive parts. Imagine if you can that there aren't any stores that do that anywhere. No Auto Zone or Napa or O'Reilly's. Imagine if I took a trip to a city that had no access to these parts to fix their vehicles. Would it not be best for that city to have a store fully stocked with people who know how to get them what they need?
 - ii. In a similar way that's what a church is for. The mission of God does not happen without missionaries going, sharing the gospel, people responding, and gathering those new disciples into a church with appointed leadership.
 - 1. Those churches raise up more missionaries. Those churches train new leaders. Those churches are the hub of ongoing ministry for years to come.
 - 2. They are a collective group of believers who mutually hold one another accountable and encourage each other weekly through the means of fellowship, praying, singing, and preaching the word.
 - iii. Paul and Barnabus did this very thing and they have returned to check on them.
 - 1. As you recall, they had already delivered the letter from the apostles and elders of the church of Jerusalem with those from the church in Antioch and others in that area.
 - 2. Now they are doing the same with the churches that had been established on the previous missionary journey.
 - a. In verses 4 and 5 you can see this and the response of the churches.
 - i. (Acts 16:4-5) ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.
 - b. Noticed the ongoing making of disciples happens through the churches that were strengthened in the faith and they increased in number daily.

- i. I heard a pastor summarize it like this: “The Spirit of God will use the word of God through the man of God to build the church of God to the glory of God.” Christian Lwanda
 - ii. Here’s the pattern of mission work: new converts, new communities, and nurturing churches
- d. The final point in the mission of God is the Triune God closes doors and opens hearts.
 - i. We’ve already seen that God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles back in chapter 14.
 - ii. Numerous places explicitly say God did this and God did that. We live under the sovereign sway of God. To think or say otherwise is an arrogant boast according to James.
 - 1. Do you recall this from James? Let’s all turn there to see it for ourselves: (Jas. 4:13-15) ¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"-- ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."
 - 2. Paul and Barnabus had the initial plan to go to those that had believed. Their plan didn’t work out as they thought. And even when they go it remains at the direction of God.
 - 3. I’m sure you think it is strange to hear some of the things we see in Acts 16.
 - a. Notice in verses (Acts 16:6-8) ⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.
 - i. There are no details of what this looked like. It could have been as simple as the road was impassable from a weather event. Who knows? But God has closed the door of ministry there for now.
 - ii. The trips I’ve been on rarely work out like you plan. It’s important to plan but all plans are subject to God’s plan.
 - 1. I recall the plans changing frequently in Russia. I got sick one day from some of the water and felt very weak. I decided that I could at least stand in the street and pass out Bibles. It wasn’t long before some of the Russian pastors joined me. It wasn’t long before one lady was calling on the name of the Lord to be saved.
 - 2. That probably doesn’t happen unless I get sick. Having been forbidden to do what we anticipated that day, we were able to speak the gospel to this particular lady.
 - 4. You pray. Plan. Go. Adjust. And keep going.
 - a. Does the gospel ever make it to Asia? Yes! We will see the details in chapter 17 later but let me give you this little snippet: (Acts 19:10) all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.
- iii. Sometimes you get some clear directions for God’s plan. God has his reasons for allowing them to travel unsuccessfully to these places. Those reasons are not often easy to discover. But we can trust the Lord to direct every step even when it seems aimless.
 - 1. The directions come by way of a vision. While in Troas trying to find their way and seemingly coming up empty at every turn, Paul receives a vision in the night.
 - a. It’s of a man in Macedonia standing there, begging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

- b. Who knows what time of the night this was but immediately they sought to go on to Macedonia.
 - i. They concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel to them.
 1. Two things I want to point out. I began this point by saying the Triune God was leading this mission. In verse 6 the Holy Spirit prevented them. In verse 7 the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go. And now they conclude the Father has sent a vision to call them to preach the gospel in Macedonia.
 2. And secondly, notice the change from third person plural to first person plural. We sought to go on. God called us. We made the voyage.
 3. So what's going on here? It is presumed that Luke the author of this book has joined the group. Maybe that's why they have been seemingly meandering around.
 4. More help has come.
- iv. The team makes their way to Philippi where they remain for some days.
 1. As the pattern has been, Paul normally went to a synagogue on the Sabbath as the first inroad. There was no synagogue in Philippi.
 2. Somehow, they get word of a place of prayer outside the city. There they find a group of women praying alongside the river.
 3. Sometimes all you have is the clear call of God. There seems to be no access to do that but they sought it out because God didn't call them there for nothing.
 4. They sat down and were speaking to the women.
 - a. The good news is a message that must be told. It is the reason God has sent them.
 - b. Mission work is not mission work if it does not involve speaking the gospel to win people to faith in Jesus Christ.
 5. Why have they come to Philippi? Why are they sitting on the bank of a river with some women who are praying?
 - a. Here's the first reason in verse 14 that says, "A certain one was listening to us, a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God."
 - i. This is a similar description of Cornelius back in chapter 10.
 - b. That's a pretty amazing resumé! But that's not what's amazing.
 - i. Watch what God does! "The Lord opened the heart to respond to what was said by Paul."
 - ii. Wow! That's why God directed them to Macedonia to speak the gospel to Lydia so that he could open her heart to believe!
 - iii. All the misdirection and failed attempts have long been forgotten.
 - iv. God saved this woman! All praise to him!
 6. She was then baptized but she's not the only one! Like the story of Cornelius, her whole household hears and believes and is baptized.
 - a. What an amazing story of grace. It makes the line in Victory in Jesus so clear when it says, "He sought me and bought me with his redeeming blood."
 7. Does it make you wonder what would compel a well-off woman to invite four strangers into her home to stay?
 - a. Grace does strange things to us. It makes us a lover of strangers which is the definition of hospitality.

- b. Perhaps, the bigger difficulty is not Lydia loving these strangers but the strangers having to be persuaded to stay.

V. Response

- a. I pray that your heart is compelled to go. Go to church and strengthen the hearts of each other. Give to the missions offering that we might send more missionaries.
- b. Seriously consider what we ought to do in identifying and training leaders to carry on the work.
- c. God has placed this church here for a reason. Are we a hub for strengthening and making disciples? That is God's mission for us. Our purpose is to worship and serve the Lord. Our mission is to make God known through speaking the gospel.
- d. Let us trust the Lord to lead us perfectly.
- e. Maybe you are here and you would describe yourself as a worshipper of God like Lydia but you have never repented and believed in the good news that God sent his son into the world to save sinners. And through him you can be forgiven of your sins and counted righteous by faith. Will you come to Jesus?