

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Acts 16:1-10

Acts 16:1-10: *"Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. ⁴ And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

⁶ Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. ⁷ After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. ⁸ So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Background Notes

The account of Paul's second missionary journey began at the end of Acts 15. Because of the controversy between Paul and Barnabas about John Mark, who had left the team after the first missionary journey, Paul chose Silas to accompany him on his second missionary trip, and Barnabas took John Mark. Thus two missionary teams went out from Antioch. Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas traveled through the regions of Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the already-existing churches.

Paul and Silas continued west until they came again to the Galatian cities of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium. Here they met Timothy, a young Christian man. When and how Timothy became a believer is not known, but it's possible that he was led to the Lord through Paul's ministry during Paul's first missionary journey to that area. This may explain why Paul referred to Timothy as his "true child," or his "son in the faith" (see 1 & 2 Timothy).

Another scenario is that Timothy's mother and grandmother were led to the Lord on Paul's first missionary journey, and they in turn led Timothy to the Lord. 2 Timothy 1:5 says, *"I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."* In any case, Paul wanted to take this younger brother along with them for on-the-job training.

This is still good practice today! It's very important for more mature believers to give younger believers on-the-job training - in the church and in missions.

So Timothy joined the team, and they continued their travels in a northwest direction, and as they went, they delivered the decrees from the first Jerusalem Council. "...they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem." These decrees were that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised before they could be saved. However, as believers, they should abstain from certain foods and behaviors for proper Christian living.

In verse 10, notice the first "we" passage in the book of Acts: "*Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.*" What's the significance of this observation? Luke wrote the book of Acts, so it seems that Dr. Luke first joined the apostle Paul's missionary team at Troas.

Doctrinal Points

1. Sometimes it is right to do what is not required.

Verse 3: "*Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.*" Is this the same apostle Paul who was so against requiring Gentiles to be circumcised, because that requirement of the Jewish Law had nothing to do with becoming a Christian? Why this apparent contradiction in Paul's position?

There is no contradiction! Timothy's circumcision had nothing to do with him becoming a Christian or being accepted into the Church. It was a matter of not offending the Jews that they were seeking to evangelize. Because Timothy had a Jewish mother, Paul felt it would be helpful if Timothy were to be circumcised, so as not to offend the Jewish community, and to relate well to Jewish people. So Timothy's circumcision **was not** a doctrinal matter. It was a matter of "moral indifference" - not a legal requirement.

However, in the case of Titus, it **was** a doctrinal matter. Paul took Titus, who was an uncircumcised Gentile believer, along with him on his first visit to Jerusalem (see Galatians 2). Paul purposely did not have Titus circumcised, to prove to the legalistic Jewish believers of the "circumcision party" in Jerusalem that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved.

Paul was not inconsistent in his decisions about circumcision. His decision depended on the situation and on the people with whom he was dealing. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 Paul wrote, "*For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under*

the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you."

In Christian service, sometimes it is right to do that which is not required - for the sake of the ministry of the gospel. This principle, that is taught in 1 Corinthians 9 and practiced by Paul in Acts 16, has many applications.

Here's one example. Suppose I'm invited to teach at a Sunday service in a large church in a wealthy suburb, where the congregation is primarily successful, well-dressed, well-to-do people. But I know that many of them are not true believers and attend church only as a social obligation. My mission before God is to communicate the gospel to these folks. According to Scripture, am I required to wear a tie and nice suit? No. So why not prove my point that salvation is not by looks by showing up and preaching in jeans and a T-shirt. Answer: because it would be offensive to these people, and most of them would not listen to a word that I said. It would be so much better for me to wear my best suit and tie, and thus get a hearing so I can communicate the good news of salvation in Christ. I think you see the point. *Sometimes it is right to do that which is not required.*

2. Sometimes it is not right to do what seems logical.

After Paul and his team left the area of Lystra and had gone through Phrygia and Galatia, it seemed logical to continue west to the big city of Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Surely this would be a good logical step in the furtherance of the gospel! But guess what? *"...when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia" (v6).* The Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching the word in Asia! So it would not have been right for Paul and the team to continue with what appeared to be a logical travel itinerary.

Logically, they then turned north and headed for the region of Bithynia, along the coast of the Black Sea. But guess what? The Lord did not permit them to go there either! *"After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them"(v7).* Here again, it would not have been right for Paul to continue with his logical travel plans.

How did the Lord make His will known in these instances? We don't know. His will may have been made known to them by a prophecy, or perhaps a vision, or circumstances, or some other means. And we don't know all the reasons why God closed these doors, which were very logical options. However, Acts 16 gives us two of the reasons: the Lord wanted them at Troas where Dr. Luke would join the team. And together they would move out to a new frontier – the continent of Europe.

The Lord opens doors and closes doors in His sovereign ways, and sometimes we don't understand all the "whys." God expects us to use our common sense in making decisions, but when God closes certain doors, it is not right to do what had seemed logical.

In 1984, Emmaus Bible College moved from the Chicago area to Dubuque, Iowa. As a member of the faculty, it was logical that I would move with my family to Dubuque. But the Lord indicated to us in a number of ways that we should stay in the Chicago area. So we did, and I commuted by long weekends from Chicago to Dubuque for almost twenty years. It didn't seem logical at the time, but we now can see many reasons why the Lord wanted us to continue living in the Chicago area. Just one reason is that Growing Christians Ministries (which includes Talks for Growing Christians) greatly expanded with a solid basis of support because we remained in the Chicago area. It's unlikely that this would have happened had we moved away at that time.

Many other illustrations could be given from our lives, and from the lives of many other believers. Sometimes it is not right to do what seems logical.

Practical Application

Thank the Lord for Paul's "Macedonian vision"!

Verses 9-10: "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Have you ever thanked the Lord for Paul's "Macedonian vision"? Many of us listening to this Talk can trace our salvation to Paul's vision. Why? Because Macedonia is part of Europe, in what is northern Greece today.

Because the gospel came to Europe, my ancestors in Scotland and France eventually heard the gospel. It rippled down through the generations, and I eventually heard the gospel and God saved me. I'm sure most of you can say something similar.

So - don't forget to thank the Lord for Paul's "Macedonian vision"!