

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 17 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 15 closes with a mixed feeling. It is sad to see Paul and Barnabas separated because of a personal difference over John Mark; whether to include him for the second missionary journey because he left the team half-way. The happy note is that while Paul and Barnabas were separated, both were determined to take the message of salvation to the neighbouring countries. Each of them formed their own missionary team. Paul recruited Silas and they revisited the churches, which the missionaries had planted on their first trip. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus. The brethren in Antioch commended Paul and Silas, and gave their blessing.

Chapter 16 records some notable change and happenings in the evangelisation efforts of the church. Since Pentecost, the converts were predominantly Jews in Jerusalem, Judaea and the neighbouring Samaria. Paul's first missionary journey was primarily directed to Jews first. In each main city that he and his team visited, they would look for a synagogue where they preached the gospel message and to proselyte Gentiles who had previously embraced Judaism. But in this chapter, there was a geographical shift: they

sailed across the Aegean Sea and ventured into Europe. This was the first penetration into Western Europe. The general atmosphere was different for they would be facing pagan religions, philosophical and political thoughts and practices. A new period of great missionary effort and achievement was initiated.

Paul's visit to Philippi marks unforgettable memories. A small church was formed in the home of a Christian business woman, and the church later blossomed to become one of the strongest of the churches Paul had established. A slave girl who was demon-possessed was delivered from spiritual bondage and exploitation by her owners. A jailer and his family found salvation in Jesus Christ. Luke selected these incidents to show God's Providence and Plan that the world might believe in Christ and be saved.

Chapter 16 can be divided into three main sections: (1) the Call to Macedonia (16:1-13); (2) the Ministry in Philippi (16:14-34); and (3) the Church Strengthened (16:35-40).

COMMENTARY

Call to Macedonia Revisiting the Churches

Paul and Silas left Antioch and revisited Derbe and Lystra, where Paul had a bad experience previously. At Lystra, Paul was introduced to a young Christian whose name was Timothy (Greek, *Timotheus* meaning: 'honouring God'). He was the son of mixed parents; his mother was Jewess and his father, Greek. His mother's name was Eunice but nothing is known of his father. His mother had strong faith in Christ and certainly had nurtured and

taught Timothy the Scriptures. The brethren in Lystra and Iconium spoke very well of Timothy, and they recommended that Paul take him on his missionary journey. It seemed that God had provided Paul and his mission team with someone who could take care of the missionaries in place of John Mark.

Paul circumcised Timothy because he had not been circumcised. One can only guess why he was not circumcised on the eighth day when he was born. Perhaps his Greek father had forbidden his son from being circumcised. Paul's circumcision of Timothy could arouse criticism that Paul was compromising. His action could be construed as going against the recent decision of the Council at Jerusalem. Paul was a strong advocate of the decision made at Jerusalem and it was not possible that he could have changed his mind. It must be made clear that Paul's circumcision of Timothy was not a necessary requirement in order to obtain salvation. Salvation is obtained only by grace through faith in Christ.

Paul circumcised Timothy because he was a Jew and secondly, he was joining his missionary team. Every Jewish male child is circumcised and that identifies him as a Jew, a descendant of Abraham. Paul did it not as a means for salvation but to respect the conscience of believing and non-believing Jews. Paul was not compromising in the matter of truth, but he was prepared to go to any length that others might benefit from the gospel. Paul merely fulfilled all righteousness. Just as Moses needed to do the same with his child who was not circumcised before he entered Egypt to take Israel out (cf. Exodus 4:24-26). In his letter to the Christians in Corinth, he clearly states (1 Corinthians 9:19-23): *For*

though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. So, Paul had Timothy circumcised in order that the young man could be more effective in preaching and serving among the Jews. It was done in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Similarly, believing Jews still keep the Passover and other "cultures" not as a requirement for salvation, but because it is God's will for Israel as taught in the OT.

The Macedonian Call

As Paul revisited the churches, he delivered the decision of the council at Jerusalem to the Christians. These churches submitted to the decision of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Their faith was strengthened and more believers were added to the churches daily.

From Lystra, Paul and his team journeyed on in the northwest direction covering the northern regions of Phrygia. In the province of Mysia, Paul wanted to go through Bithynia and preach the word in Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade him. Paul wanted to go east but the LORD wanted him to go west. The text did not reveal the way in which the Holy Spirit stopped them from

entering Bithynia. But the fact was that Paul and his team were sure that the change in their initial plan to enter Bithynia was the direction of the Holy Spirit, as the saying goes: “Man proposes; God disposes.” The team then turned westward and came to Troas, a seaport on the Aegean coast of western Asia Minor. The seaport was founded by the Greeks in 300 B.C. Paul and his team rested there for the night. Paul had a vision from the Lord that night. Paul saw a man of Macedonia who pleaded with him to come over to Macedonia and help them. Paul’s response to the vision was positive; he immediately sought to go over to Macedonia. He was sure that it was the Lord who had called them to go and preach the gospel to the Macedonians. Observe that Luke, the writer, now joined the team – the use of the personal pronoun “we” (v.10). He, being a physician, would be a great asset and assistance to the missionaries. They sailed from Troas on a straight course by the island of Samothracia. The winds were good to them and they took two days to arrive at Neapolis (new city), a seaport on the eastern coast of the European continent.

Ministry in Philippi

From Neapolis, they travelled the Egnatian Way for about ten miles south before they came to Philippi. The city was conquered by the Romans in 167 B.C. and gained the status of a Roman colony. It therefore assumed a form of government, which was independent of the provincial administration. The city enjoyed certain privileges accorded by Rome. They had two chief magistrates assisted by a number of officials.

Lydia the Business Woman

On the Sabbath day, Paul would have looked for a synagogue but there was none. It meant that there were very few Jews, perhaps less than ten, for it had to have ten Jews to set up a synagogue. Unperturbed, Paul and his companions went out of the city. They came to a place by the riverside where prayer sessions were customarily held. On a Sabbath day, Paul and his companions went to this place and found a group of women gathered there. Paul joined and began to speak to them.

Among the women who were gathered in the place was a woman named Lydia. She was a native of Thyatira, a city which is mentioned in the Book of Revelation and which was famous for its expensive purple dye and the production of purple garments.¹ Lydia was a merchant selling purple-dyed clothes. Apparently, Lydia came to Philippi for business because the city was busier and more well-known than Thyatira. She therefore was a woman of some means and position. In addition, she worshipped God whom she probably had heard from the Jews in Thyatira. She heard Paul’s message and the Lord opened her heart and she believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. She immediately requested for baptism together with her family, an evidence of her genuine faith in Christ. Moreover, she opened her house to Paul and his companions. Her house had enough rooms to accommodate her guests. She was insistent and persuaded them that their refusal to stay would tantamount to

¹ Revelation 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; 19 I

doubting her sincere faith in Christ. The missionaries could not refuse.

The Demon-Possessed Slave Girl

In the city was a slave-girl who was possessed with “a spirit of divination” (literally, a python demon).² She was a fortune-teller who earned a good income for her owners. She claimed to be able to foresee the future and to give information and advice to save people from troubles, which lay ahead. Many people believed her and valued her services.

Every day as Paul and Silas made their way to and from the place of prayer by the river, she would follow them. She would also cry out: “These men are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto us the way of salvation” (v.17). Paul was troubled and displeased. He then turned to the slave-girl, speaking to the demon and commanding him in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. The demon obediently came out of the slave-girl!

God’s Word clearly reveals that there is a real world of spirits. There are angels who are loyal to God, and there are fallen angels or demons that oppose Him. These demons can communicate with human beings and in some cases, they possess people. Paul exorcised the slave-girl and delivered her from the bondage of darkness and wickedness. Why did Paul do it? Did she not declare favourably that Paul and Silas were servants of the Most High God? What are Paul’s reasons for exorcising the slave-girl?

²“from Putho (the name of the region where Delphi, the seat of the famous oracle, was located); a Python, i.e. (by analogy, with the supposed diviner there) inspiration (soothsaying):-- divination.” [Strong’s Greek Dictionary – Swordsearcher 4.0 CD rom].

Paul recognised that the spirit indwelling the slave-girl was an evil spirit. Nothing that an evil spirit declares is compatible with the Christian faith or with God even though what the evil spirit says seems to be the truth. The spirit that spoke through the slave-girl was actually hostile to Jesus Christ. In a pagan context, “the Most High God” could mean the chief god of the heathens. It could refer to Zeus, the chief god of Indo-Europeans. The Philippians could have understood it this way. What do you think of this explanation?

Her declaration was not to lead people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, she was claiming to be allied to Paul and Silas. And if Paul and Silas had accepted her testimony, it would have appeared in the eyes of the people to authenticate the “spirit of divination” in her. Her reference to salvation was not about deliverance from God’s judgement of man’s sin but rather it was about salvation from troubles or mishaps which she professed to foresee and accordingly advised the people. Do you agree with this observation?

Paul demonstrated an uncompromising hostility to this demonic personality. He commanded the demon to get out of the slave-girl in the name of Jesus Christ. The demon had to bow and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. The demon came out and the slave-girl was freed from being controlled by the evil spirit. Paul’s exorcism of the demon from the slave-girl incurred the anger of her owners. As a result, they were deprived of the monetary gains, which they had so far enjoyed. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace. In Greek cities, the marketplace (Greek, *agora*) was the

centre of social life and the place where the people gathered. It was also the place where the city magistrates would dispense justice. They trumped up false charges against Paul and Silas that being Jews, they created a lot of trouble in their city. They falsely accused Paul and Silas for teaching unlawful customs which they, being Romans, could not accept (vv. 20, 21).

These men were clearly dishonest and deceitful. They dared not tell the magistrates that they had lost their income gained by exploiting the demon-possessed slave-girl who had been delivered. The charges they came up with were meant to whip up the magistrates' anger towards Paul and Silas for teaching things against Roman laws and customs. In those days, Rome was tolerant of all matters of religion. The Roman government always respected the religions of the people they conquered; but it sternly prohibited Romans from changing their religion to another, and it would persecute all forms of faith, which were not legally recognised. Observe how subtly the slave owners played on the feelings of the people.

They appealed to their racial and political prejudices against Paul and Silas – “these men being Jews” (v.20) and “us...being Romans” (v.21). Luke and Timothy were Gentiles and they were not touched. The Philippians were proud people and they were also Roman citizens. The people were enraged and rose up against the missionaries. The magistrates, without ascertaining the charges and giving the accused a chance to speak, straightaway ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten – Roman style, just like Jesus Christ was beaten. This must be one of the three beatings, which Paul

mentioned to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:23). After the beating, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison and the jailer was ordered to guard the prisoners securely. Accordingly, the jailer locked them in the inner dungeon, which was dark and obnoxious. He chained even the feet of the missionaries to prevent them from escaping.

The Jailer at Philippi

The public charge against Paul and Silas was false, the verdict unjust, and the punishment cruel. But Paul and Silas, despite being bruised and bleeding would not be defeated. Instead, they triumphed over their ill-treatment and sufferings by praying and singing praises to God. They were suffering for Christ's sake – “servants (bondmen) of the Most High God” – and they could still glorify God in tribulations. Their praying and singing were heard by the prisoners. The prisoners, men who would not hear a sermon, now strained their ears to hear the words of the hymns. God also heard their prayers and praises. Suddenly, there was a big earthquake, which shook the foundation of the prison. The gates of the prisons instantly swung open, and the chains on every prisoner were loosed. A wonderful opportunity for the prisoners to run and escape!

The jailer was aroused from his sleep. The hymn-singing did not wake him up. His soul was awakened by the terror of the earthquake. Jailers were chosen from the lowest class of people for the job then, and the usual punishment for one's neglect of duty would be death for him and his family.

When the jailer was awake, his first sight was of the prison doors, which were open, and thinking that the

prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself. But Paul shouted with a loud voice to stop him and said that none of the prisoners had escaped. He asked for a light and leapt down to the dungeon where Paul was. He came trembling and bowed down before Paul and Silas. Trembling, he addressed Paul and Silas as “lords”, no more as criminals but dreaded servants of the Most High. Then he asked: “What must I do to be saved?”

It is not easy to explain why the jailer asked the question: Did he know he was a sinner and condemned; did he hope that Paul and Silas would help save him from his masters; or had he heard of the testimony of the slave-girl or heard some of Paul’s preaching to the people? We cannot be sure of these things. But what we do know is that the jailer and his family believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were saved!

In response to his question, Paul told him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and he and his family would be saved (v.31). He believed. He then brought his family to Paul and Silas who shared the gospel with them and they also believed and were saved. That night, the jailer washed and treated the stripes on the bodies of the missionaries. Paul then baptised him and his family. After that, the jailer took them to his home where he set a meal for Paul and Silas, obviously knowing that they had gone without food for some time. The jailer was happy and rejoicing, believing in God with his whole family. What a transformation and change in the life of the jailer!

THE CHURCH STRENGTHENED

God vindicated His servants. In the following morning; the magistrates sent the officers to tell the jailer to free

Paul and Silas. Evidently, the magistrates were uneasy about the whole affair – no inquiry, no regular trial, and they wanted to get rid of the incident. But wrong-doing is not so easily gotten rid of. The jailer broke the news to Paul and Silas that they were free to go. Paul answered that the magistrates had them beaten openly without a fair trial, thus humiliating them. As Roman citizens, they should not be subject to such treatment. They threw them into prison and now they wanted to throw them out secretly. This kind of treatment to a Roman citizen was a great injustice and a crime.³ Paul demanded that the magistrates should come personally to escort them out. Paul’s demand of the magistrates was not done out of revenge or personal retaliation. The magistrates had not apologised for their misdeed. Moreover, Paul wanted to establish his innocence in order to protect the believers in Philippi that they had done nothing wrong against the Roman government. This was to avoid a precedent of mistreating Christian missionaries with hasty harshness. The magistrates agreed to this public exoneration of the two Jews, Paul and Silas. Having known that Paul and Silas were also Roman citizens, they feared for their own safety and status. But they insisted that Paul and Silas leave the city. Paul and Silas did not leave Philippi until they had gone to Lydia’s house where Paul and Silas encouraged and comforted the believers. Paul and Silas then departed.

³ The greatest Roman orator, Cicero (106-43 B.C.) remarked: “To bind a Roman citizen is a misdeed, to scourge him is a crime, to put him to death is almost a parricide.”

PRACTICAL VALUE

Christians sometimes have to make seemingly difficult choices and decisions in their daily lives. Paul had to decide whether it was needful to circumcise Timothy when the topic was a hot issue. Paul's requirement for Timothy to be circumcised helps Christians to apply the same principle in dealing with such matters. We have to make a clear distinction between Biblical doctrine and practice. While Biblical doctrine cannot be compromised, the practical aspects of Christian living can be correctly and appropriately applied with sensitivity and common sense. As Paul says, (1 Corinthians 10:23): *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*

As every Christian is indwelt with the Holy Spirit, it is important that we are sensitive to the leading and guidance of the Spirit in our actions. Paul set a good example. He planned to enter Asia and preach the gospel of salvation which is understandably within the will of God, and yet he was forbidden to do so. God wanted him to go to Europe. One of the ways is to understand and know what the will of God is. This implies having a sound and solid knowledge of the Word. If Christians were diligent and conscientious in this regard, great things could have been achieved for themselves and the church corporately.

The conversions of Lydia and the jailer are good examples of genuine conversion. There are natural evidences of true conversions. There is the public testimony in baptism of one who has accepted and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is understood that these converts realised their need to repent and believe that Jesus Christ

has died for their sins and has resurrected from the dead. There is also the evidence of joy and desire to be with other fellow Christians. Both Lydia and the jailer exhibited these characteristics. Christians today must show the same thinking, attitude and behaviour.

Christians must always accept the fact that they attract people who may be antagonistic towards their beliefs and witness. The exclusivity of the Christian Faith – that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Way and the Truth and Life, without any compromise, is offensive to other persuasions. Sometimes, God allows His people to be persecuted and some even endured until death. Christians should not waver or question the wisdom and purpose of God. He knows what is best for His people who are precious to Him, and who may have to suffer for His sake in order to achieve His greater purpose. God knows and will vindicate in His appointed time and place. Meanwhile, be steadfast and unmoveable. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Acts 16:1-5; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:2.

Tuesday: Acts 16:6-15; John 6:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6.

Wednesday: Acts 16:16-24; 2 Corinthians 11:25

Thursday: Acts 16:25-34; Hebrews 11:33-34; 2 Timothy 1:7

Friday: Acts 16:35-41; Philippians 4:15, 2 Peter 2:9.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised?

2. What lessons can be learned about seeking God's will from the Holy Spirit's instructions and direction to Paul and his companions?

3. Why did Paul cast out the demon from the girl? Did she not tell the truth?

4. Can the Christian cast out demons today the way that Paul cast out the demons?

5. How does the response of the jailer (vv.31-34) to the gospel compare to Lydia's (vv.14-15, 40)? What does this tell us about the nature of the gospel?

6. Persecution in the midst of blessings or vice versa was true then. Do you believe that it is also true today too? Please provide biblical support for your answer.

7. Do you believe that demons still roam the world today? Where are they found today? Are they found in Calvary Pandan?
