

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

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April memory verse Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

We remember at the end of our study last week there arose a contention between Paul and Barnabas who had been close companions on the first missionary venture of the church. But because Barnabas was insisting on taking his nephew John Mark, who deserted Paul and Barnabas on the first trip, Barnabas was wanting to take him on the second trip and Paul was objecting because of his defection on the first trip. They had a dispute over this, contention so great that Barnabas took Mark and headed off for Cyprus, and so Paul took Silas and they headed for Asia Minor.

So in chapter 16,

Then he [Paul and Silas] came to Derbe and Lystra ([Act 16:1](#)):

Derbe was one of the few places where Paul had a very peaceful, uneventful kind of a ministry. It didn't end with a riot or with Paul getting jailed or stoned or anything. He was able to leave town very peacefully which was unusual for his ministry. But then they came to Lystra where Paul was stoned and thought to be dead, and drug out of town thinking that he was dead.

and, behold, there was a certain disciple there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, who was a believer; and his father was a Greek ([Act 16:1](#)):

Now this second-coming of Paul to Lystra was probably some five years after his first visit when he was stoned. Coming back to that place where he had planted a church five years later. It was no doubt extremely encouraging to Paul to see that there was a church continuing in that area. They were going on in the Lord.

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

Jesus said to His disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should be my disciples and you should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" ([John 15:16](#)). And a very important part to any ministry is the remaining fruit. It's not really how many people you can get excited and make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Five years later, how many people are still going on with the Lord? That's what really counts. And coming to Lystra, they found this certain disciple, Timothy, who probably had accepted the Lord five years earlier under Paul's ministry there in his first journey. But now, of course, in the five years he's grown up, he's matured, and here he is a faithful disciple. His mother a Jewess, his father a Greek.

And he received good reports about Timothy from the brethren that were there in Lystra and Iconium ([Act 16:2](#)).

He came highly recommended. And Paul wanted Timothy to join them. Now, earlier Paul had Mark on the journey. It was handy to have these young men with a lot of energy and enthusiasm going along. And also, I believe there was that desire to disciple Timothy.

I think that discipleship is a very important part of the ministry when God has blessed and used a person in the ministry. I think that if they are wise, will always be looking towards the next generation.

I have a very keen interest in young people, in young people who have those God-given abilities, anointings upon their lives. I like to invest time with them, because they are going to be carrying on when we're carried off. And I'm concerned that the work of God go on. And so Paul, no doubt, had asked Timothy to go, thinking of the fact that he wasn't going to be there forever and the training of these young men to carry on the work once they are gone.

So Timothy became a companion of Paul. In six of Paul's epistles, as he opens the epistle, he includes Timothy in the greetings. Paul writes two epistles to Timothy. Paul speaks of the help that Timothy was to him. He asks that they would send Timothy to him speedily, bringing some of the documents and all that he was desiring. And so there came a very close relationship between Paul and Timothy, who Paul called, "my own son in the faith." So Timothy was one of Paul's converts, but then he was also tutored by the apostle Paul.

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

Paul would have him to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem ([Act 16:3-4](#)).

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

Then why is it that we have a paradox? Why would then Paul see that Timothy was circumcised? I am certain that it was just that beautiful adaptability of Paul not wanting to create a greater havoc than what already existed among the Jews who knew that Timothy's father was a Greek. And so rather than just having a hassle with them, it was, "Go ahead and do it, what difference does it make? It doesn't matter. Go ahead." And for the sake of these contentious brethren, go ahead and be circumcised. It was as Paul wrote later, "I have learned to become all things to all men, that I might gain the more" ([1 Corinthians 9:22](#)). To the Jew I became as a Jew. To those that are free from the law, I became as one who is free to the law. All things to all men.

And I think that this is just a part of Paul's philosophy, and I think that it is a good philosophy. As he wrote to the Romans, "Live peaceably with all men, as much as lieth in you" ([Romans 12:18](#)). As far as is possible on your part, live at peace with all men. And if some issue comes up and it is no big deal to you, go along with it instead of, you know, making a big issue and creating a big scene over it. Just be cool and flow with it, you know. And this was Paul's philosophy, just to get along as best as possible.

Now when it came to a thing of conscience or faith, then you stand your ground. Now when the church in Jerusalem was trying to throw the law upon the Gentiles, Paul stood his ground. When Peter there in the church of Antioch who was eating with the Gentiles until certain brothers came down from Jerusalem and then Peter separated himself and wouldn't eat with the Gentiles and it caused a division there in Antioch, Paul said, "I withstood him to the face because he was at fault." Creating this division by

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

his separating himself from the Gentiles, as though there were in Christ some division between Jew and Gentile.

So on a matter of principal, a matter of conviction, stand your ground. But where there's no big deal, flow with it. Go for it. You know, just to keep peace among the brethren. I think that was, no doubt, Paul's philosophy behind the circumcision of Timothy when they are carrying the very message from the church in Jerusalem, you don't have to be circumcised if you're a Gentile and keep the law in order to be saved. So just because they knew that his father was a Greek, Paul had him take the right of circumcision just to keep peace. So they went through the cities delivering the decrees from the church in Jerusalem.

And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily ([Act 16:5](#)).

The early church was a powerful church; it was a successful church. And as we will soon see, it was a church that was under the direct governing power of the Holy Spirit. He was guiding the activities of the early church and I believe that, that was the reason for success. It was a tragic day when in the church man decided to substitute the work of the Holy Spirit with his own work.

Paul wrote to the Galatians later, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you would so soon turn from the truth. Having begun in the Spirit, will you now be made perfect in the flesh?" ([Galatians 3:1,3](#)) And I'm sure if Paul were writing to the general church today, the whole church, he would write an epistle to the church of Jesus Christ of the twentieth century, "O foolish people! Who hath bewitched you that you should turn from the truth? The church having begun in the Spirit, do you think that you can perfect it, complete it in the flesh?"

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia: but the Spirit would not allow them. And passing by Mysia came down to Troas ([Act 16:6-8](#)).

Now Paul is trying to move north into Asia, but every attempt he makes is being blocked by the Spirit. Now it is interesting that it tells us that the Spirit forbade them to go and preach the Word in Asia. The Spirit would not allow

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

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

Many believe that the Spirit forbid them through Paul's sickness, that Paul was just too sick to travel. Now you remember when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said, "You remember how that when I was with you," (notice they were passing through Galatia here), "how I ministered to you out of great weakness, physical infirmity. And you showed such great love and concern for me because of my physical infirmities." I think that does give us a very strong hint of the method of the Lord in stopping Paul. It is interesting, as I said, he was a very stubborn kind of a person. I mean, he was one that was hard to stop.

When he wanted to do something, he was going to do it no matter what. When he was determined to go back to Jerusalem, there was no stopping him. His friends, when the prophecy came and said, "You know, you're going to be in prison when you get to Jerusalem," and his friends began to weep and said, "Paul, don't go. They're going to throw you in jail!" He said, "Hey, what do you mean by these tears? Are you trying to dissuade me? Don't you realize that I'm not afraid of being thrown in jail? I'm ready to die for Jesus in Jerusalem."

So you just don't stop those fellows with a tap on the shoulder and say, "I don't think you ought to go there." Paul's an unstoppable kind of a fellow. And this is a good characteristic in one sense. Surely he would not have been able to endure all of the hardships of his missionary ventures had he not had this strong, powerful spirit. Yet our strong points can also be our weak points. And if this strong point is not totally yielded to God, then it can become a weak point in my life. And it means that when God wants to direct me, He has to get pretty tough.

And it is possible that Paul was so determined to go to Asia that God had to put him on his back and make him so sick he couldn't get out of bed. And after several days in bed not able to roll over, he said, "Well, the Spirit forbid us to go to Asia. And so then we attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit would not allow us. So we went on to Troas." So there at Troas, Paul had a vision.

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

And there appeared to Paul in the night; a man of Macedonia, and he prayed to him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us ([Act 16:9](#)).

So Paul in the night vision saw this man from Macedonia crying for help.

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go to Macedonia ([Act 16:10](#)),

Now notice, here we had a plural pronoun, *we*. You remember that Luke is the author of the book of Acts. This is the first time the personal pronoun is used. So it is no doubt here at Troas where Luke met Paul, and it is very possible that the reason why Luke met Paul is because Luke was a physician and Paul was so sick he was about to die. That's one possibility.

There are others who believe that Luke was the man that Paul saw in his vision crying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Whatever the case may be, now Luke turns to the personal plural pronouns, because at this point, Luke became a companion with Paul. Notice it in the rest of the verse. "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go to Macedonia,"

assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them ([Act 16:10](#)).

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

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

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

He established a very successful work in Panama City, and one evening he received a call from one of the doctors at the hospital there in Panama and he said, "We have an old man who doesn't seem to have any friends or family and he's dying, and we thought it might be well if there were a minister here to just talk to him. He seems to be delirious."

And so Dr. Edwards went to the hospital, and when the nurse led him to the room, to his amazement, the old man was the man he saw in his vision. And he became very curious about this old man. And so he began to inquire and they found out that he was a Presbyterian missionary. They really didn't know much of what was accomplished through his work there, but Dr. Edwards was so amazed that here's the very same man he saw in his vision in San Jose when he felt the call of God to go to Panama. And he felt really that he was completing the harvest that this man had begun. He had established just a few mission stations out in the bush of Panama.

So God is not limited by His means. I have never had a vision nor was I directed by an angel or vision or whatever to go into the ministry. God's call upon my heart was different. I just felt a strong urge to go into the ministry. God just placed a deep desire in my heart to commit my life to Him. And so I always thought it would have been exciting had the Lord sent some angel along or had given me some vision, and there had been some dramatic experience of which I could testify to you tonight of how God came to me in the night hours and suddenly the room began to glow with a strange incandescence, you know. And I heard this voice say, "Chuck...I want you!" You know, but nothing like that happened to me.

Our faith has to be established in fact. God's Word is the fact upon which my faith is established, and that way my faith never wavers because God's Word never changes. Now, if I am basing my faith in some experience that I have had, then I'm in dangerous water. Because I may get another contrary experience or the experience can fade. Emotions can wane, but the Word of God remains, and thus, my faith must be established in God's Word. And my ministry must be established according to the Word of God, not according to some exciting, remarkable fiery letters in the sky that I saw at one time when I was watching a sunset.

So Paul was directed by this vision. He sought immediately to answer it.

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis ([Act 16:11](#));

The winds were with them, and they headed straight across from Troas to Neapolis, which was the port city of Philippi. It took them only two days. They had good winds. They were carrying them the direction they wanted to go. Later Paul made this same crossing. It took five days. But God is guiding him now to Macedonia, he endeavors to obey the call of God. The winds are with him and he comes right across to Macedonia.

Sometimes as we're serving the Lord the winds are with us. Things go smooth. We're cooking right along. Other times, hey, it's a heavy push all the way. You know, it seems like you're rowing all the way, the wind is against you. But it doesn't mean that I'm out of the will of God because it's difficult now. And I cannot really just say, "Well, God, which direction do You want me to go?" And try to determine which way is the wind blowing and then head that direction.

And from Neapolis they went to Philippi ([Act 16:12](#)),

Which of course was a Roman colony. Philippi was an important city in history. This is where Brutus was defeated by Marc Anthony in that critical battle there at Philippi.

they were in that city abiding certain days ([Act 16:12](#)).

So they're now in a whole new environment. They're into Greece; they're into Europe. It's different from the Asian culture, and they're just there for several days really doing nothing.

But on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither ([Act 16:13](#)).

Now the fact that there was no synagogue in Philippi indicates that there were not ten adult Jewish males in the town. Whenever in any city there were ten adult Jewish males, they would have a synagogue. In the towns where they had less than that number adult Jewish males, not enough to have a synagogue, then they usually would meet by a river for prayer and they would go through the sabbath prayers by a river. And so Paul found out where they were meeting and he went down, and evidently there

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

weren't any Jewish men believers, just women that were there. And so Paul sat down and he spoke to the women which had gathered there by the river to pray.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, who was from Thyatira [she was actually from Asia], which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she begged us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide. And she constrained us ([Act 16:14-15](#)).

Now notice she was a seller of purple, and I might say she no doubt was a very successful businesswoman. Notice the way she puts the pressure on Paul and the party. "Now if you have counted me worthy, then come and stay at my house." Well, you know, if you don't stay then you're saying, "No, woman, you're not worthy, you know." And so she puts it in such a way. She no doubt was a very good sales person. She was surely able to put the pressure on Paul and the party. "If you judge me to be faithful to the Lord then come and stay at my house. And she constrained us."

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel who was possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by her soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their profits were gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market place unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, are Jews, and they are exceedingly troubling our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks ([Act 16:16-24](#)).

So opposition arises, and this time from a little different reason. There was this girl possessed by a spirit by which she could tell fortunes. There were

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

men who controlled her. They made a lot of money off of her fortune telling ability. In those days people had a strange respect for the insane. They believed that the gods had taken their minds from them and replaced them many times with the minds of the gods. And so the people had sort of a strange reverence towards the insane.

This young lady, possessed by this spirit, able to tell fortunes, able to divine things, was declaring the truth about Paul and his company. She said, "These men are servants of the most high God and they show unto us the way of salvation." Now she's really advertising for them. What she is saying is true. But Paul doesn't want Satan running his advertising campaign. Again, I think that there is a danger of the church seeking to emulate the world in its advertising campaigns. Doing it the way of the world, following the worldly patterns. It is indicative of the church today in many quarters to hire professionals to come in for church growth programs. And there are professionals who will come in and they get a percentage for as many members as they can add to the church, they get so much for each member they can add to your church.

There are those professional fundraisers who will come into the church, and they will raise the church budget for you by going around contacting all of the people and putting the pressure on them for their pledges to give so much to the church this year. And then you set it all up on a computer program and if you don't get your pledge in this month, you start getting letters, you know, "We missed your pledge. The church is depending upon your promise to give so much and our whole spending is predicated upon that and you have missed." And you start getting all this kind of stuff. And it's really following the worldly patterns.

Paul wanted nothing to do with advertisement from this quarter. So he commanded the spirit to come out of her. He was grieved over this experience. It was a hard thing. And so when those men who were profiting off of her ability saw that she was healed, they were upset. Isn't that terrible that men would be so mercenary that they would be upset because this young girl was set free from this tragic experience that she had being possessed by an evil spirit. At any rate, Paul's in jail. Thrown into the dungeon, the inner prison. His feet are fast in the stocks.

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them ([Act 16:25](#)).

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

I imagine that they weren't too happy with them singing at midnight, and they probably wondered what kind of nuts have they thrown in here! But yet what a witness to these men! They had been beaten; they had laid many stripes upon them. It doesn't say anything about them washing the blood off their backs, but just thrown into this filth infested dungeon, tied to the stocks. And rather than just, you know, here you are, you're so far from home, you're in a different culture, you're in a different territory. You don't know what your future is. It's midnight and usually that's the darkest hour of the day, and here they are praising the Lord, singing together, praises unto God and praying.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awoke out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and was going to kill himself ([Act 16:26-27](#)),

Because if the prisoners escaped, he was held responsible for them and would have been put to death.

And he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. So he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? ([Act 16:27-30](#))

You know, I believe that the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to be put in jail just to reach this man. And when you get to heaven and you say, "Do you think that that's fair, Paul, that God allowed you to get beat like that and thrown in prison just so that jailer could get saved? Do you think God's fair doing that to you?" I think as Paul would point out, "Well, there he is over there and there's his family. Not only was he saved, but his whole family. Hey, you bet! I'd gladly do it in order that I might have him as my eternal brother here in God's kingdom." And I really believe that God was just reaching that Philippian jailer. And that was the reason why he allowed Paul to be in prison.

"What must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Join the church; pay your tithes."

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ([Act 16:31](#)),

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

You mean, that's all? That's all. Believing in Jesus Christ. God has made it so simple. There's no excuse for anyone not being saved. Paul added, and thy house ([Act 16:31](#)).

Now there are some people who take this as a promise of the scripture, claiming their salvation's family because Paul added, "and thy house." I do not believe that this is solid enough scriptural base to establish a doctrine. I believe that Paul could have been speaking here a word of prophecy. There are indications that even Paul's own house was not saved. I do believe that we are to pray and to believe God for the salvation for our families. And I strongly encourage each of you to continue to pray for those, your loved ones, your kin, who are not yet saved. And to believe and trust God for their salvation. But I do not believe that you can use this as a scriptural base to claim their salvation as some do. Because it says,

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house ([Act 16:32](#)).

So they witnessed not only to him, but to his family.

And he took them the same hour of the night [that is, the jailer took them], and washed their stripes; and he was baptized, he and all of his ([Act 16:33](#)),

So his whole family was baptized.

And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all of his house ([Act 16:34](#)).

So there was salvation of all of his house, but they all believed and all were baptized.

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this to Paul, he said, The magistrates have sent to let you go: therefore depart, and go in peace ([Act 16:35-36](#)).

And here is Paul's stubbornness coming out now. Oh, I really more than excuse Paul, I say, "All right! Go for it Paul!" He's doing what I would have no doubt done under the same circumstances.

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they think they will just let us go privately? No way; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. So the sergeants told these words to the magistrates [the judges]: and they feared, when they heard that they were Roman citizens ([Act 16:37-38](#)).

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

And so they came and begged them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city ([Act 16:39](#)).

Hey, fellas, do you mind just leaving town?

And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed ([Act 16:40](#)).

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

Commentary on Acts chapter 16 by Chuck Smith 4.30.23

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