

The Great Stories of the Early Church
52 - Paul and Silas03
Evangelism at Philippi
Acts 16:6-40

- 6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,
- 7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.
- 8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.
- 9 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.
- 10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.
- 11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;
- 12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.
- 13 And 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.
- 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.
- 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.
- 16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:
- 17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.
- 18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.
- 19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,
- 20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,
- 21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.
- 22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.
- 23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:
- 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

26 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.

27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.

36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

40 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. KJV

Introduction:

You will recall, I trust, that we now in the Second Missionary Journey of Paul. Barnabas has left him and gone to Cyprus so Silas is now traveling with him. They have also acquired a young man to go with them on the journey, Timothy, a convert from Derbe. You should also recall that this trip had begun as a visit to the brethren who had been converted on the First Missionary Journey. Since Barnabas is in Cyprus, he is apparently doing that there so Paul has determined to go overland from Antioch in Syria to the region he and Barnabas had previously visited. He is approaching the region from the east rather than the west as he had previously done so they are visiting the saints in the reverse order as before.

When he came to Antioch in Pisidia, the point in Turkey where they had originally turned back east, he proceeded westward rather than turning south and then sailing back to Syria. Galatia was a territory which cut Turkey in two from North to South, so anyone going westward from Antioch of Pisidia would travel through it. There were obviously churches planted there for Paul would write to them later when the same sort of folks came there with their heresies as had

troubled the church at Antioch in Syria. Phrygia lay just to the west of Galatia, so we do not know why it is mentioned second. While little attention is given to this work we do not know but Paul did mention it in his letter to them.

Gal 4:13-14

13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. KJV

We do not know what “infirmity” he meant. It could have been injuries received on his first trip to Lystra when he was stoned nearly to death or it may be that his eyesight was beginning to become a problem. Hence, the need for a young man to go with him and assist him, a young man who could go into the Synagogues with him. So, Timothy.

Mysia lay to the northwest of Phrygia and Asia due west. Bithynia would have been to the north along the Black Sea but the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, would not give them permission to go there. So, they determined to turn south to Asia, along the western coast of Turkey, along the Aegean Sea, but the Spirit said “no” to that as well. So, they had continued to lands end at Troas and sought further guidance from God. The visions of the man from Macedonia had settled their questions and they had sailed directly to the capitol city, Philippi.

But before we leave Troas behind we must notice that the missionary party was joined there by another figure, one that will prove very important in the history of Christianity for he is to become a very useful helper as well as the earliest historian of the Church, author of the gospel of Luke as well as The Acts of the Apostles.

Notice vs. 8-12. Suddenly the pronouns changed from “them” to “we,” and we observe as many Christian scholars have done over the centuries that the writer of the story had suddenly become a part of the story. But, notice how the shift happened so subtly that one might not notice if he were not paying attention. The first thing, then, we learn about Luke is that he is a profoundly humble man who is not interested at all in drawing attention to himself just as John did not mention his own name except as absolutely necessary in his Gospel.

Not much is known about Luke outside of scripture although some of the early historians mentioned him. In Col. 4:14 Paul mentioned him, calling him “the beloved physician.” Church history is pretty solid on the fact that he was indeed trained as a doctor, which meant he would have had an extensive Greek education. Those that are scholars tell us that his writing gives evidence of that. When Paul mentioned to Timothy in 2 Tim 4:10,11 that he had been abandoned by all of his helpers, he carefully noted that Luke was the only one with him. And, he was mentioned again in Philemon, v. 24, one of Paul’s last letters. It is believed that Luke was with Paul at least until the imprisonment at Rome ended, either by Paul’s release or his execution. No one really know which.

As is often the case, the fact that little is known about him has led to wildly varying stories and much speculation. Here is one of the versions:

“St. Luke was born at Antioch, the metropolis of Syria, a city celebrated for its extraordinary blessings and eminences, the pleasantness of its situation, the fertility of its soil, the riches of its traffic, the wisdom of its senate, the learning of its professors, the civility and politeness of its inhabitants, by the pens of some of the

greatest orators of their times :* and yet, above all these, renowned for this one peculiar honour, that here it was that " the disciples were first called Christians." It was an university, replenished with schools of learning, wherein were professors of all arts and sciences. So that being born in the very lap of the Muses, he could not well miss of an ingenuous and liberal education; his natural parts meeting with the advantages of great improvements. Nay, we are told,^b that he studied not only at Antioch, but in all the schools both of Greece and Egypt, where by he became accomplished in all parts of learning and human sciences. Being thus furnished out with skill in all the preparatory institutions of philosophy, he more particularly applied himself to the study of physic, for which the Grecian academies were most famous ; though they that hence infer the quality of his birth and fortunes, forget to consider, that this noble art was in those times generally managed by persons of no better rank than servants : upon which account a learned man conceives St.Luke, though a Syrian by birth, to have been a servant at Rome, where he sometimes practised physic, and whence being manumitted, he returned into his own country, and probably continued his profession all his life : it being so fairly consistent with, and in many cases so subservient to, the ministry of the gospel and the care of souls. Besides his abilities in physic, he is said to have been very skillful in painting, and there are no less than three or four several pieces still in being, pretended to have been drawn with his own hand...

"He was a Jewish proselyte, Antioch abounding with men of that nation, who had here their synagogues and schools of education; Most probable it is, that he was converted by St.Paul during his abode at Antioch ; when as the apostles, of catchers of fish were become fishers of men, so he, of a physician of the body became a physician of the soul.... He became ever after his inseparable companion and fellow-labourer in the ministry of the gospel, especially after his going into Macedonia ; from which time, in recording the history of St. Paul's travels, he always speaks of himself in his own person. He followed him in all his dangers ; was with him at his several arraignments at Jerusalem ; accompanied him in his desperate voyage to Rome, where he still attended on him to serve his necessities, and supply those ministerial offices which the apostle's confinement would not suffer him to undergo, and especially in carrying messages to those churches where he had planted Christianity. This infinitely endeared him to St. Paul, who owned him for his fellow-labourer, called him " the beloved physician," and " the brother whose praise is in the gospel, throughout all the churches;" which the ancients, and especially Ignatius, apply to our evangelist."¹

This story of Luke after Rome is not well known though one of the ancient writers had him going to Italy and France where some think Paul went after being released from Rome. Luke, however, became an extremely valuable helper to Paul as he endured imprisonment while in poor physical condition. He was greatly used in the preservation of Paul's physical comfort and health.

So, the humble and faithful Luke, a man of great education, joined the party at Troas and was with them as they came to Philippi, Macedonia to minister.

I find the behavior of the group when they came to Philippi very interesting. They did not immediately begin preaching somewhere but, as Luke said, "we were in that city

¹ The Lives of the Apostles and the Two Evangelists Saint Mark and Saint Luke, Willam Cave D. D., revised by Henry Cary M.A., 1840

abiding certain days.” We will deal with that more in a little while. But, after a number of days and on a Jewish Sabbath they went to a place outside the city, on a river side, where people who were inclined to pray apparently congregated.

It was apparently the custom of Jews in cities where there was no synagogue to find a place away from the bustle of daily life to keep the Sabbath by resting and to spend the time in both individual and communal prayer. Whether anything else went on or not we cannot say but it does seem that Paul’s presence and willingness to teach them was well received. We might take note that it may have been uncomfortable for women who had businesses to refuse service if they were present in their homes and people were desiring to purchase things. We know that at least one of the women was a business woman and it appears that they all were independent since they were able to be free on the Sabbath.

This was during the time that Nero was blaming the Jews for his problems and casting them out of Rome and it may have been that Philippi, a Roman colony, had followed suit. The Jewish families had left the city and what remained were some stragglers who were either Jewish or had been affected by the Jewish teaching.

Luke is quite careful to tell us that one particular woman had been prepared by God to receive the message.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

You will note that she was already a worshiper of God, much as Cornelius was, though whether she was Jewish or a proselyte we cannot tell.

She was a merchant, a woman of some means, and not only had a business but was at the head of a household. No husband is mentioned, so we can draw no conclusions as to her status. She isn’t called a widow, so we presume her husband had divorced her, which was common in this culture, or she had never married. She does, however, seem to have been well educated biblically.

Interestingly, Paul had been prohibited from preaching in Asia and had come to Philippi because he has seen a man of Macedonia appealing to him for help. But his first convert is a woman from Thyatira, a city of Asia. God has strange means sometimes in carrying out His plans.

The city of Thyatira was known for supplying the region with purple dye and with clothes dyed purple. Trade guilds were very popular and strictly controlled the trade so that their people were normally well paid and their trades protected. Purple was a much desired and very expensive color thus we see from that time that the wealthy and particularly royalty would often be dressed in purple. It was a way to make the point that much money had been spent on the clothing. If you did not have purple clothing to wear to grand events you were not truly wealthy.

It very possible that the conversion of Lydia had something to do with the church at Thyatira

being started which we read about in Rev 2:18-29, a very troubled church by the end of the century but with a faithful remnant.

It appears that all or almost all of Lydia's house was also converted since no one was baptized in the early church except for those who professed a whole-hearted faith. Remember the Ethiopian and Phillip?

Acts 8:36-38

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. KJV

Even though our Presbyterian friends would like to believe otherwise there is no indication that either in Lydia's house or the jailer's children were baptized below the age of reason and accountability.

But here is the thing I want you to notice from this text.

This is an idea that has been rolling around in my head for a long time and this text pushed me to address it more fully.

I want you to try to imagine a group of preachers in our day who had been given a commission and a vision directly from God to go to Macedonia and preach the gospel. Try to picture them entering the city of Philippi and think about what they might do. Some would want to rent the amphitheater and publish advertisements of a meeting. Some would set up shop and begin preaching on the streets. Others would hang out at the games and pass out tracts to those coming and going from the events. See what I mean?

But what did Paul and his entourage do? They hung out in the city for a while. It seems that they were studying the goings on there. We know that they observed a particular location where some women, presumably of some Jewish persuasion, were going to pray on the Sabbath day. So, they paid them a visit, sat down there by the river with them and spoke to them of Christ.

What I notice in the NT is that rarely did the preachers speak to anyone except for those who expressed interest or who invited them to speak. We see almost nothing, if anything, of this modern idea of accosting people who have neither desired nor asked for any word or teaching.

It seems that the NT evangelists were much more confident in and respectful of the fact that God must create an opening before any profitable evangelism can take place.

As Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke spent those first days in Philippi I am sure that they were praying for wisdom, for God to show them an opening and give them an opportunity to speak to someone about their need. They did not despise the fact that their first convert was a woman and it seems they kept up the meetings at the river, outside of town until they were arrested.

We do not have the time for the story of the demon possessed woman but look at what it tells us about the conduct of our evangelists.

- 16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:
- 17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.
- 18 And this did she many days.

As they went to prayer many days this woman would follow them. So, the early established pattern of worship among the believing at Philippi was outside of the city by the river.

It has been noted by the historians that while the Romans often tolerated other religions and did not forbid them from meeting, they did not sanction them either and did not want others worshiping openly in their cities. Paul was aware and found a way around a direct confrontation with the powers in place, at least until he disrupted the business of some of them.

So, here, I believe is some wonderful guidance for evangelism, far better than much that has been offered in our day.

1. Recognize that whatever you are called to be and do in this life you are first and foremost a messenger of Jesus Christ to speak His gospel to the world.
2. Make sure you understand the gospel and can articulate at least your own testimony to a lost soul and do it with biblical references. Be willing and able to show the basics of what you believe.
3. Commit yourself to bear witness to Him when He provides you with opportunity.
4. Be observant and willing to learn the patterns of those around you. Notice where interest may lie in spiritual things.
5. When you find a seemingly interested soul, politely offer to discuss the gospel with them.
6. Recognize that God must open the heart and be patiently praying until He does.
7. Encourage any who believe to follow the Lord completely, be baptized, become an active part of the church.

Remember the patterns that we have.

Isa 42:1-3

- 1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.
- 2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.
- 3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. KJV

Matt 3:1-6

- 1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
- 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- 3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one

- crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
- 4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.
- 5 **Then went out to him** Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,
- 6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. KJV

Matt 4:23-5:2

- 23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, **teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (*One had to be invited to speak in the synagogue*)
- 24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.
- 25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

Matthew 5

- 1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:
- 2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, KJV

Acts 13:13-16

- 13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.
- 14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.
- 15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, **Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.**
- 16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. KJV

It is important to have the permission of the one to whom we speak, to have their interest and their willingness to listen. Otherwise, the effort is almost always fruitless.

Don't get burned out on useless endeavor. Pray for opportunities. Ask for wisdom. Take advantage of invitations. Once invited do not be shy.