

Act Four

Activity

Churches are active communities. They are communities of believers. They are communions and unions of men and women bound by the common faith in and experience of new-life in Christ. These new assemblies needed guidance and nurturing if they were to grow and prosper. They needed instruction and wise council. They needed discipleship.

A church without proper discipleship is ever vulnerable to a “subversion” by the enemies of truth. The apostles wrote authoritative letters to the gentile believers to clarify the message of the gospel of grace. *“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to who we gave no such commandment”* Acts 15:24.

New believers always have many questions. Their enthusiasm makes them susceptible to extremists who would take advantage of their zeal and openness. New believers are anxious to absorb and assimilate all the things God has for them and need to be given guidelines for growth and survival.

Discipleship is a clarification of truth and instruction in righteousness. The church at Jerusalem sent out ministers to counsel (23), comfort (24), and to confirm the new Christians (32). We are not told how long the teachers remained at Antioch beyond what is called a “space.” Silas, who was one of the two visiting teachers, remained at Antioch with Paul and Barnabas while Barsabas apparently returned to Jerusalem to report to the Apostles of the progress among the gentiles. After *“some days”* Paul and Barnabas decided it was time to pay another visit to the newly established assemblies to *“conform the saints,”* and to do follow-up and discipleship among the believers that resulted from their first missionary adventure, so thus begins the second.

Mission Activity

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The second journey almost never began. A division broke the unique partnership of Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas wanted to take his nephew John Mark along once again. Paul refused to allow him to be part of the team, obviously because of his previous failure in faithfulness. The contention was so “sharp” that they *“departed asunder one from the other.”*

It is always sad when God’s servants cannot agree and “get along.” We have those who will always take sides in an issue like this. There are those who stand with Paul and those who support Barnabas. There are those who, like the son of consolation, quickly forgive and forget, and who not only welcome any prodigal home, but are quick to “kill the fatted calf and make merry.”

Others feel that the standards of the ministry are higher, more holy, and serious. Paul was human. Paul was of like passions as us. Paul may have been right. He may have been wrong. It should also be remembered that Paul was the one who was stoned, not Barnabas. Perhaps Paul still bore in his body the marks of the attack in Lystra. Perhaps, he still felt great pain as a result of the violence upon his person and thought more like a general choosing faithful soldiers who were going to be called upon to endure hardship. Perhaps his letter to Timothy (Mark’s replacement) expressed how Paul felt about any would-be servant of God or missionary as he challenged the young minister to *“endure hardness, as a good soldier”* (ITim2:3), (something Barnabas’ nephew failed to do). Paul also mentions in another place *“Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto [him] at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra,”* (3: 11). These are places John Mark, Paul’s footmen should have been. It was in these places that the Apostle needed someone to wipe the blood from his bleeding head, and to bind up his wounds. God calls faithful men. And Timothy is encouraged to find and commit eternal truths and responsibilities to *“faithful men.”* Nevertheless, God works all things together for good. He has a way of making beauty come from ashes.

Two missionary teams instead of one left the city of Antioch. Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas as partners and went separate ways.

The beginning of this second term involved a confirmation of the churches already established. Paul revisited Derbe and Lystra the cities that inflicted so much pain upon him. Why would anyone want to return to a city in which he had been stoned and left for dead? Missionary work must be a Spirit and not feeling-led. In Derbe Paul would add a new worker to the ranks of Christianity and subsequently two books to the Bible by enlisting Timothy into God's service. After Timothy was joined to the party, the Holy Spirit stirred Paul's heart to carry the Gospel into new and untried territory. The church has its explorers, its pioneers, and its settlers. Paul was a pioneer.

The very same Spirit who opens doors also closes them. Wise is the saint who knows the difference. Paul tried to go to Mysia and Asia. This should not seem strange to us. It should encourage us to know that God does not have simply a general, or genetic will for our lives, but rather a specific one. God cares about the details as well as the directions of our lives and service. Doors close in different ways. Exactly what "*suffered them not*" means we are not sure, but we know that Paul was sensitive to the leading and guidance of God. Perhaps it was as simple as a warning, or a report of the day that made it obvious that "now was not a good time to visit that region." It may have been a lack of peace or a doubt that troubled his heart. God's will is not found without some soul searching, and much prayer. Paul was guided by a holy hand.

Eventually the Apostle found himself at Troas not far from the water's edge. Not only was Paul praying, but there was another praying (or at least imploring that someone to) "*come over and help us.*" This famous Macedonian vision has been the catalyst used to call thousands of men and women to leave the comforts of home in order to proclaim the gospel to the nations.

When Paul set out on his second journey he had no idea of going into Macedonia. God leads his children one step at a time. We are safe when we follow the counsel to just "do the next thing." Don't worry about God's will for next year. Just do God's will today.

Action in Europe

This is the real beginning of the second missionary journey. There are no letters to the church at Lystra, or Antioch, but there are letters to the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica. Paul always began in or near a synagogue. Perhaps because of a lack of Jews, there was no synagogue in Philippi. For this reason Paul chose the next best thing; he sought out a place of prayer. Everything of real spiritual consequence and value begins with prayer. Every great work begins when someone pauses to pray. Prayer was the beginning of the church in Europe.

The very first convert in Philippi was a woman named Lydia who was a seller of purple. Perhaps Paul preached to her from Isaiah and used as his text "*come now let us reason together saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool.*" We don't know what was his text, but we do know what was his topic. The favorite topic of this missionary was Christ. The one who came to shed His blood, to wash our sins away. Whatever the chapter and verse might have been, God used it to "*open*" her heart. Conversion is not as much a head thing as it is a heart thing. Paul would later unsuccessfully attempt to reach the heads of men in Athens. No one is converted in their head without first being convicted in their heart.

Confronting Demon Activity

Paul soon met another woman who was possessed with an evil spirit. The doors to her heart had been barred shut from within. What deal she made with the devil we do not know, but she somehow crossed a line and became a servant of darkness. She followed the Apostles, shouting out declarations about their presence and purpose in such a way that it grieved Paul. Whether she had a mocking tone, or an hysterical manner, or was summoning other forces of darkness is unknown, but finally Paul turned and addressed, not the woman, but the spirit to “*come out of her.*” This demon must have fought violently, for the Scriptures do not say it came out “*immediately*” but within the hour. As God opened the heart of Lydia, He now emptied the heart of this poor woman and hopefully she allowed Christ to fill the void and replace darkness with light.

Suddenly those who took advantage of this woman and the demon of divination were out of business. Nothing will anger the forces of darkness more than someone lighting a candle. No bartender wants to lose his customers through conversion. There is a large industry marketing and trading in evil. Fortunes are made in the trade of darkness and in feeding the appetites of depraved hearts. Vice, superstition, and religion are still big business.

Paul was arrested and charged with being a trouble maker. Perhaps the exorcism created a scene as the demon fought to remain where it was. Perhaps the poor woman who had been the hysterical herald had first attracted a crowd and then was seemingly thrown into convulsions by Paul’s verbal confrontation. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into the “*inner*” prison. Sometimes doing God’s will and doing “right” results in our being beaten and cast into what seems to be the very bowels of hell. The “*inner*” prison was reserved for the worst offenders and was the scene of the most untold sorrow.

Acting right when treated wrong

With feet fast in stocks the helpless were not hopeless. They began to sing. The world can take away our sunlight, but not our song. It can take away our liberty, but not our love. It can take away our pulpit, but not our prayer. It can take away our place, but not our power. The church in Europe began with pray and it survived through prayer. Prayer gives us access to the God of all power. It prevents the spirit of the saint from being a prisoner though he be in stocks. Praise allows the heart to soar even while the servant is in leg irons.

The famous conversion of the Philippian jailor is well known. It will suffice here to point out that salvation is possible for the most ardent antagonist of truth. The temperament of a jailer is not typically one of tenderness and kindness. More often than not the holder of prison keys was calloused of heart and cruel. If the Philippian jailer could be converted, no one is hopeless. The message is the same today as it was in the earthquake damaged prison in Philippi “*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*” We should pray for our antagonists and praise God even if we find ourselves in some inner prison.

After Paul was released from prison he returned to Lydia’s house. It was probably in her house that the first church in Europe was started. A church is not a building, but (as we shall see in the next section) it is a community of people.

From Philippi the missionary team traveled to the city of Thessalonica and again followed the principle of “*to the Jew first.*” It was only natural for “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” The Jews had the Scriptures, so it was the logical and the spiritual place to begin. Paul is said to have “reasoned with them out of the scriptures.” His text might have always been different but his topic was the same, “*Christ.*” He spoke of how Christ had fulfilled all the biblical prophecies and satisfied all the requirements of the Messiah, how he was crucified, and how he rose from the dead. The result of his first effort was that “*some believed.*” Those who “*believed not*” (17: 5) were moved with envy and caused an uproar. A crowd of ruffians were enlisted to attack the house of Jason who was charged with sedition and treason against Caesar, the same charge used by the

enemies of Christ in Jerusalem. The result of this attack was the swift departure of Paul and Silas to Berea. The Jews of this city were said to be “*more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*” Apparently the leaders of the synagogue in Thessalonica were less interested in truth as much as in maintaining the status quo. We learn from these experiences of others of the importance of comparing any teaching carefully with the inspired Word of God. The New Testament Church was active. They were engaged in spiritual work and warfare. They were being used of God to change the world, one soul at a time.

The history of the New Testament Church is called the Book of Acts. It was an active community interacting with a needy and unbelieving world. Many are satisfied gathering around and guarding the “facts.” Our life will be measured by our acts. I did not say that salvation is the result of our acts. Salvation is the result of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Real faith rest on the fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus. But real faith follows the resurrected Christ, and acts consistent with a transformed and resurrected life.