

God at Work

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[0 : 00] So we've come to Paul's second missionary journey. Paul has finished with the guys he was with. His first journey and now we've come to his second missionary journey.

And basically he is going to different cities and towns, strengthening existing churches. He goes to encourage them. He goes to bring them good news and good teaching.

And he also plants new churches. He goes to new towns and new cities and plants churches there.

And I think that's a really great model for denominations, for churches today.

The thing is it would be really good for us to get back to very simple focus in our churches.

As churches we are there to strengthen the believers, encourage them and in our countries to plant new churches.

[1 : 01] That would be a great model on which to base all our committees and all our strategies as a church as a denomination. And I think the ecclesiastical landscape in Scotland is changing rapidly.

It's not going to be the same as it always was. It's not going to be how we always envisaged it to be. But I think it's very important for us that in these changes ecclesiastically that we are gospel people first, free church people second, that we're going out with the gospel, that we're encouraging one another with the gospel, that we're planting churches that are gospel-centered churches and reaching out to the lost of our nation.

Getting back to what we were 160 maybe years ago as a church for an example, making strong, planting new. It's very radical, it's also very simple and it's a good focus for us to have.

Okay, so that's just by way of introduction. Now we've got some questions here in the order of service, the bulletin sheet and as we've been doing, we're going to look through the first couple of questions and apply the truths of this chapter to ourselves so that we, I hope, understand what Scripture is saying to us as we look at it together.

So the first question is considering Paul's vehement opposition to adding anything else to the gospel. Remember we looked at that last week, there was a big discussion at the assembly, in Jerusalem, which said that the Gentiles needed to accept Jesus as their saviour and that circumcision was not something that was necessary to their faith and we weren't to add anything to their faith, except belief in Jesus Christ.

[3 : 04] And then they were encouraged to be sympathetic or considerate of Jewish believers by accepting the kosher laws and things like that during this time.

But they had this big discussion and decision about what the gospel was, didn't they? And Paul Barnabas was saying, no, it's not Jesus Christ plus, in that case, getting circumcised, having the Old Testament ritual.

It's not that, you don't do that, it's Jesus Christ alone. So considering Paul's vehement opposition to adding anything to the gospel, why can he allow Timothy here to be circumcised?

Because we read that, didn't we, the beginning of the chapter, that he took a new team member with him, Timothy, brothers at Lystra and Iconium, spoke well of him.

Paul wanted to take him along the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews that lived in that area for the All-New's Father. He was a Greek and they travelled from town to town delivering the decisions and strengthening the church and the church's group numbers.

[4 : 09] So, we have a contradiction there, do we not? With Paul in the previous chapter, he said, no, the circumcision, absolutely not, it's the gospel and nothing else. And now we have him encouraging Timothy to be circumcised.

Why can he allow that? What's happening here? Why is Timothy being allowed to be circumcised? Is that not against everything that he stood for at the Council in Jerusalem in the previous chapter?

Thinking caps on, don't be passive, this is the word of God, you read it in your own homes, you've got to understand what it's saying, otherwise you walk away thinking it's contradictory and it can't be trusted and it's not significant.

Why do you think Timothy here is being circumcised? Why is Paul allowing that to happen? I did get some answers online. Okay.

Good answer.

[5 : 20] Did everyone hear that? It wasn't adding anything to the gospel, correct? It was that he was allowing Timothy to be more acceptable as an evangelist among the Jewish people that they'd be going to.

It was very similar to the circumstances of the previous chapter. It was missional accommodation. So in order for Timothy to be more accepted in the same way as the Gentiles in the previous chapter, we're going to not take part in the dietary requirements or the dietary freedom that they were allowed as they were worshiping and as they were witnessing.

So here we see that Timothy is willing, voluntarily we presume, to go to Great Lentz to not be a stumbling block as he goes out with the gospel, but he's willing to take part in this ritual, not because it adds to his salvation, that is significant for his salvation, but because he knows it will make him more readily acceptable and will be listened to by the Jewish people that they go to the gospel with first and then as they reach out to everyone else.

If you turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 9, we kind of have this principle being worked out by Paul. 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 14.

[7 : 01] In the same way the Lord, I'll go further down I think, from verse maybe 19, yeah.

Though I am free, Paul says, I belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I become like a Jew, to win the Jews.

To those under the law I become like one under the law, though I myself am not under the law, so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I become like one not having the law, though I am not free from God's law but under Christ's law, so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I become weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.

And that's an outstanding commentary on his and the willingness of others to go to great lengths to be all things to all men.

[8 : 09] Sometimes that in our churches has become a dirty word so you're all things to all men. You've got no backbone, you just go with the flow. You just blow whichever way the wind's blowing.

But that's not what's been spoken about here. This is spoken about real moral courage, knowing what you believe, knowing what's significant, knowing what you can compromise on and for the sake of winning people over Christ, you're willing to be flexible in order to do so.

And that is exactly what was happening, I believe, with Timothy. It wasn't a gospel necessity. It wasn't an order that he would be an acceptable Christian that he was circumcised.

Because in Galatians 2 verse 3 we have Paul arguing that Titus, who he takes with him, should not be circumcised. A different situation, different background, different surroundings.

And he argues there, no, he's not going to be because that would compromise the gospel message. But here it's different. Timothy agrees willingly as a missionary to accommodate those to whom he's going with the gospel with this sacrificial and painful act for the sake of the gospel.

[9 : 28] Missionary accommodation. Okay. Emma. Do you think it makes a difference that Timothy is quite Jewish? Yes.

I think it does make a difference that he was partly Jewish as well. He had a Jewish mother and a Greek father and that again would have been something that would have made it more acceptable for him to be among and witness among Jews if he went through that ritual and he was willing to do so for the sake of the gospel.

Okay. Now the second question is slightly different from what we normally do. I'm not quite sure if anyone will respond to it. But there's a reason for me doing that this evening.

There are three stories of people in Philippi. This is where he church plants, coming to faith in Jesus. There's Lydia. There's the servant girl, we don't have her name, and we have the jailer who we also don't have his name.

And these are three different characters and they're in a town where he's preaching the gospel and planting a church. This is the examples that he gives of three people coming to faith.

[10:40] Would you be willing to choose one of them? Imagine what their testimony would be like, background, job, character, conversion, etc. and share it from the pew tonight. And the reason I'm doing that is because you've got three very different type of people.

You've got Lydia, the slave girl, and the Philippian jailer. Is anyone willing to imagine what their testimony would be like and share it?

I recognise, not the sort of thing you can just maybe do off the top of your head. But if anyone did think about Day Spring.

Absolutely a slave girl. Okay, you're a slave girl, so. Excellent. Excellent. So you're thinking there of someone who has nothing, absolutely nothing in her life.

She's a slave girl. She's probably Greek. She's a resident in Philippi. Undoubtedly without any self-esteem, owned nothing, possessed of an evil spirit.

[11:44] Not a lot going for her. But with that possession, she has knowledge of spiritual realities and was able to discern these men of God and the message they were bringing.

Okay. We have Lydia and the jailer. Mordo, did I see something in the website that you said that you were willing to be a jailer?

Okay. Excellent. Thanks, Mordo. So we've got the jailer and we've got the slave.

The jailer was very probably a Roman soldier, retired Roman soldier, tough individual, probably a roughly kind of middle class type person. Who would have his own home and fairly pleasant standard of living.

And then the first person is Lydia. And Lydia is different again. She's maybe Asiatic. She's wealthy. She's an individual, businesswoman, intellectual.

[12:50] And here's the word of God. And God opens her heart. And we have three people there from hugely different cultural backgrounds, different sociological backgrounds, different sexes, different employment, completely different, different status in life.

And Jesus Christ is the one who redeems them and buys them back and sets them free. And they become united in one church, the church in Philippi that ends up being a church that Paul writes to. I just want to say one thing about that. A Jewish man at the time of Christ, a good upstanding Jewish man at the time of Christ, would pray a prayer every morning.

And that prayer was, I thank you, my God, for not having let me be born a woman, a Gentile, or a slave.

That wasn't a biblical prayer. It wasn't an Old Testament prayer. It was a prayer that came into the Jewish religion. And here we have that prayer being turned in its head, that God's starts founds this church with a Gentile, a woman, and a slave.

[14:16] They were worthless to ordinary people, but they were hugely significant and worthy to the living God. And that's how that church was started.

Now, I want us to sing again together before looking at the last sections. And it's in Psalm 40, which is a Psalm of well-known, it's from the traditional version of the Psalms, a Psalm of testimony, I waited for the Lord, my God, patiently to bear at length to me, He didn't climb my voice and cry to me.

We'll stand to sing, and Hamish will lead us through singing. Okay, briefly then, what lessons can we learn from this chapter about the nature of the church?

Well, I'm just going to say a little bit about that because we already talked about it. It's God's body, it's God's people by design. And what we see, at least from this chapter, is that it's a sending church.

It's an outgoing church, it reaches out. It is a church that is looking to build the kingdom of God and to plant gospel ministry in new places.

[15:28] Relentlessly evangelistic. We can become very good at naval gazing and looking inward and examining ourselves and criticising and condemning maybe ourselves or others.

But the New Testament churches are relentlessly evangelistic church, a sending church. It's a church that strengthens its members. We saw that, didn't we?

Paul and Timothy went around and they strengthened the believers in the new churches. They made them song, what did they do? They took them back to foundations. We're looking at this morning to 1 Peter.

The foundations of the gospel, they strengthened them in the faith. It's a growing church. I told that at the end of this chapter, the end of the first section, the churches were strengthening the faith and grew daily in numbers.

A growing church. And as we also saw from the three examples that are given from this church, it's only three, we know that there would have been a lot more. The three examples are given, it's a diverse church.

[16 : 32] And that may be a challenge to us, that it's a diverse church. It's a church where there's all kinds of people.

And that they are equally loved and embraced and accepted in Christ. But secondly, God's guidance for His people. What can we learn about God's guidance?

See, there's this second section where Paul and his companions travel. They have a plan to reach out in the second mission. They go to certain places and the door to these places, as we would quite often use the terminology, the doors closed.

They can't go to the province of Asia. Then they can't go to Bethany. And then when they're waiting, Paul gets a vision, come over to Macedonia, and then they conclude that that's where God had called them to preach the gospel.

So there's a wee section there about God guiding His people. Probably the most common question I get as a pastor is, what's God's will for me? How do I know what God wants from me?

[17 : 43] And this is a passage about guidance, a short passage about guidance. Is there anything that you think we can learn about guidance from God from this short passage, God's guidance for His people?

Is there anything? Tom, you just blown your cheeks out already.

You looked like you had an answer there. Well, as soon as the celebration of the Virgin, the Roman was responded when they were giving a prayer, the Holy Spirit went to the Spirit.

They responded to the guidance they'd been given. What was the guidance? In what form did it come? In a vision.

Anything else we can learn about God's guidance? Do you think it says, for example, they were kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia, then were told the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to go to Bythena?

[18 : 58] Okay. Do you think, how do you think God transmitted that information to them?

We don't know, do we? We're not told. We presume, maybe you make presumptions about how God spoke to them, but as they look back, they recognise that God didn't want them to go that way. How did he do it? I don't know. Did he do it legally in terms of using some kind of legal prohibition for them to go in there? Did he use illness?

Did he use a coincidence of something that happened during the day? Did he speak to them directly as he later did in the vision? We don't really know. But we do know he closed certain doors for them, and then he opened the door to preach in Macedonia.

So they discerned, however God spoke to them, they discerned that God didn't want them to go certain places. They'd made plans, remember, as believers, as evangelists, they'd made plans to go certain places.

[20 : 04] God said, no, I've got a different plan for you, and he made it clear for them. But then the last section where we told that they leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them there.

That word concluding, it really means bringing together in one mind. In other words, they had this vision, but they didn't just accept it like that and say, oh, that's God who spoke to us in a vision.

They sat down and they considered together what God had been saying over the last number of days and weeks, and concluded that indeed this is what he wanted them to do.

So there was a progressive revelation of God's will to them, what we would call some doors being closed, some doors being opened. And I'm sure for some of the time as they travelled about and as places, their plans were being changed, they were perplexed.

What's God wanting from us? Where does he want us to go? What does he want us to do? We've made all these great plans to preach the gospel and he's closing the door. We don't know where we're going and we don't know what his plan is.

[21 : 15] It must have been for them perplexing, until finally God made clear to them what his will was. And I think we recognise that in our own lives that sometimes our plans, he changes by

closing the doors, by not allowing, we look and we believe that we're going to get a certain job, or we're going to get in a certain degree course, or we're going to go out with some certain person, and he closes that door, it doesn't happen.

And we're too late and sometimes we're perplexed about what his plans are, what his purposes are, but we wait on him. And we hopefully don't just go on a whim, but we conclude, we pray, and we come together in one mind, learning from other Christians what God's will is for us.

Using the church, using our city groups, using our Christian friendships to know God's will in our lives. Guidance is a very important thing. And as these people prayed and waited on the Lord, he made his mind clear to them.

Okay, common elements in Christian conversion. You get three different conversions that we looked at there. There was Lydia, the slave girl, and the jailer. Is there anything about them, although they're hugely different, that is common to all three, that is important for us to remember? And just go one more thing and then we close. So Christian conversion here, Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer. What's common to them all? Hearing the word of God in their own environment.

[22 : 54] Okay, so they hear a message, and they hear a message in a circumstance that they're relaxed. Well, the jailer wasn't very relaxed, but he was in his own environment. So the word of God has gone out to them.

A message has been brought to them. Lydia is praying. She's at the place of prayer. Slave girl is going about her occultic work. And the jailer is jailing.

And the message is brought to them. The message, there is a message is brought to them. That is a common element. They hear a message. A Christ-centered message is brought to them intentionally.

And it's brought to them by other people. By you and me. What other elements are common here to Christian conversion?

There's a transformation of their lives. Almost immediately their lives are changed.

[23 : 58] They see the love of Christ. And in two cases, the evidence of the slave girl is rather circumstantial. We're not actually told that she comes to faith, but we're told that she's healed from her evil spirit.

The other two, there's immediate change. Their hearts are opened. So are their homes. Lydia wants the believers to come back to her house. And so does the Philippian jailer.

He opens his home. So he's opening his life, in other words, to the Christians. Immediately there's a quick transformation. Anything else that's common to them all? God's Holy Spirit is something that's been actually...

Yeah, God is crucially involved. God's Holy Spirit works in each of these conversions. He opens Lydia's heart. He heals the slave girl. And he uses an earthquake and the message of the gospel to change the Philippian jailer.

There's divine orchestration in each of these conversions. And that is hugely significant for us as we crave people's souls in St. Columba's and among our friends.

[25 : 05] That we see these common elements that we are used. There's messengers who bring a message. It's not just our lives, but the message that comes from our lives.

The message of the good news of the gospel. And we're used to share that message. But also we need God. We need God to open people's hearts.

To intervene, to cooperate as it were. Although the whole work of conversion is His. He still uses us. And we desperately need Him to work in people's hearts.

To open people's hearts. To answer our prayers for people so that they will come to faith. So there are these common elements that are still the same today.

When people come to Christ, there's evidence of changed lives. There's joy. There's healing.

There's openness. There's hospitality. God is crucially involved. There's a message that needs to be shared.

[26 : 08] And we are the people who God uses to share that message. And that's if we're going to be a church, a planting church. If we're going to share the gospel, these things are very important for us.

Okay, last thing. What does the chapter tell us about being mission minded? I'll maybe just share with you what I have from this as we close. Because we have here Paul and Timothy going out with the gospel.

We recognize and we see, I hope, that they are sensitive to God's word and God's will and God's mind for them. They're willing to change their plans as they are mission minded because they're sensitive to what God is saying.

They're willing to take risks for the gospel. Paul and Timothy are willing to be imprisoned for the gospel. They're willing to share the gospel in that way.

Sorry, Paul and Silas in prison. They are willing to be beaten for the gospel. Timothy's willing to be circumcised for the gospel.

[27 : 16] Great sacrificial spirit in going out with the gospel. They're culturally sensitive. They're prayerful. They're able to praise and magnify God even in the midst of suffering.

And their lives are hugely intentional for the gospel. They have this focus for Jesus Christ and the gospel. So I hope that you find that in these chapters we don't only have a record of the founding of the church in the New Testament, but we have models of Christian living, Christian mission, church and church polity and church life.

And all that goes with that, that is relevant and applicable to our own lives. And the personal guidance from God that we can learn from chapters like this and may it be that we're able to do so. I hope that you're able at some points during this series to just click onto the website, answer some of the questions, because it's great because I find that the answers people give are very different sometimes from what I'm thinking.

And therefore I learn from that and I hope that others learn also as we share our thoughts around God's word together. So let's bow our heads and pray as we think about these words.

[28 : 41] Lord God, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you for the message of the gospel. We thank you for Dr. Luke and his recording of this early church missionary work by the power and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you that at least on some of this journey as we read in this chapter, Luke was a colleague, was a team member with Paul and Silas and Paul and Timothy.

And we thank you for that and we thank you for the relevance of the message still as it reaches out to us in our lives.

And we pray that we would be a diverse people, that we would be welcoming of those different to us and from us but united in one family in the name of Jesus Christ.

And we would recognize that the New Testament broke all kinds of barriers so that it was neither slave nor free, male nor female, and that there was neither Jew nor Greek, but in Christ all were one.

[29 : 53] And we thank you that in Christ we are one. And we pray that we would be one not just in name only but in love and in work and in sacrifice and in commitment to one another.

We pray that we would have a passion to share the gospel and that we would see our role, our cooperative role in sharing the message and not only living for Christ, not only praising God in the midst of bleak and difficult circumstances, but also telling people about the great good news of Jesus and his wonderful salvation.

So may we be simple messengers, ambassadors for Jesus. Bless us as we sing together a parting. Song of praise and may lift our spirits as we leave this evening for the challenges and the pleasures and the difficulties in some cases of this week into which we've entered.

By God's grace, may we move forward in faith and through the Holy Spirit. Amen.