**ACTS & US**

**BELIEVE, and be Saved**

**Chapter 16**

Last week: Acts 15 – The Jerusalem Council

They needed to decide what to do with the influx of Non-Jewish people (Gentiles) that were now coming into faith in the Jewish Messiah. Should they make them adhere to all the Hebrew rituals and “mitzvot” (commandments), that the Jewish believers grew up with and completed? The church was divided, some felt they should not be required to be circumcised and adhere to other aspects of the law, while others felt that the Gentile believers should be required to do all that was commanded in the law, including circumcision.

Peter, in the final words he spoke in the book of Acts, gave clarity to them and us on what we must do to be saved.

**Acts 15:10-11**“why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? 11No! We believe it is through the *grace* of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

This was all new to them. The thought of *non-Jews* being part of the household of God was one thing, the fact that *all people* are now saved only *by grace through faith* was another. Peter had been faithful to deliver the message of Justification by Faith and the Power of the Holy Spirit to both Jews and non-jews throughout the first half of the book of Acts, but seemingly disappears for the rest of Acts.

Not much is known about where Peter went during the years that Paul and Barnabas brought the gospel to Galatia and Macedonia, but most scholars believe that he lived in Jerusalem until such a time where he and his wife move to Rome (which he called Babylon) and was crucified there upside down around 64AD.

The book of Acts continues with a focus now primarily on Paul. Remember it was written by Luke who was a physician and historian. It is believed that Luke actually accompanied Paul and Silas beginning in this chapter when they arrived in Philippi, because he begins using the *first-person pronoun* “we” in verse 16.

As they prepared for the second missionary journey, Barnabas and Paul had a sharp dispute and parted ways in Acts 15 over John Mark. Paul did not want to take him because he had deserted them last time, but Barnabas did. As it turns out, Barnabas and John Mark sailed Southwest to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas and traveled Northwest along the coast through Cilicia (an Official Roman Province), which is where Paul’s hometown of Tarsus was, making him a Roman citizen.

Almost all of the cities they had visited so far in their journeys (Lystra, Perga, Iconium, Derbe, Psidian Antioch), were in Asia-minor, what is now called modern-day *Turkey*. In this chapter Paul had planned to revisit these towns then head Northeast into Bithynia along the Back Sea, but was stopped.

Also in this chapter he met a young man named Timothy, whom he developed such a close mentorship relationship with, that he became one of Paul’s closest companions and called him his *son*.



**CHAPTER 16**

**Acts 16** “Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. 2The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”

Paul, instantly became a father-figure to Timothy. He recognized that Timothy was a young man of astounding wisdom and knowledge, having been taught thoroughly by his Jewish grandmother Lois, and his Jewish mother Eunice, but not his Greek Father. Paul believed that Timothy would only be able to operate in authority among the Jews if he was circumcised, so he did that, not for adherence to the law, but for the sake of the gospel. It worked, they churches they visited grew strong in the faith and in numbers.

6 “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.”

Paul wanted to continue to plant and build churches in northern Galatia (Turkey), but God had other plans. He wanted him to travel for the first time outside of Asia, west to Macedonia (Modern day Greece), bringing the gospel for the first time into the continent of Europe.

*(Reminder, don’t be upset if the Lord stops your plans, He may have something exponentially better for you if you are willing, obedient, and available). Always listen for the “Macedonian Call”, the ‘plan-changer’ that is an invitation to greater things.)*

9During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

11From Troas*we* put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. 12From there we traveled to *Philippi,* a Roman colony and the leading city of that districtof Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

13On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. 15When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

Lydia was part of a group of women that they were preaching to outside the city gate. She was a merchant, a seller of expensive purple dye (found only in rare mollusks and used for royal or priestly robes). She immediately believed their message, was baptized along with her family and showed hospitality to Paul and his companions. She is remembered as the first convert to Christianity in Europe.

So far, their trip to Europe was pleasant and well-received, but that was about to change.

16 “Once when *we* were going to the place of prayer, *we* were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” 18She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.”

This poor slave girl was possessed by an evil spirit that made her a fortune-teller. Her owners exploited her and made money through her in Philippi. The spirit also forced her to follow Paul and the rest around shouting what was actually the truth about why they came, but in a manner that would expose them and cause the town to reject their message and turn against them.

Paul cast the demon out of the girl, leaving her free from its control, but also the spirit could no longer to tell fortunes through her.” This infuriated the slave owners who incited the who town to turn against them.

19 “When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.

22The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

Here they are in a strange city, far from their country and continent, having just been stripped and beaten, and held in a high security jail. They were physically wounded, defenseless and had no idea what horrors were awaiting them. So what did they do?

25 “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”

They prayed and sang to God!

They did not despair, complain, or doubt God. They called out to Him in prayer and worshipped Him.

*(Question: How do WE respond when everything seems to be going wrong?)*

26 “Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. 27The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

29The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31They replied, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*

This jailer saw the amazing faith of Paul and Silas despite their awful predicament. He the power of the Lord as the earth shook and the prison doors broke open.

He thought that he prisoners had all escaped under his watch which would have meant that he would be executed, (just like in Acts 12 when Peter was miraculously released from jail), but when he saw that the prisoners did not escape, he was so amazed that he asked the most important question: “what must I do to be saved?”

And they replied with the most important answer, “BELIEVE”!

v.31” *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!”*

—you and your household.” 32Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was *filled with joy* because he had come to *believe in God*—he and his whole household.

The Philippian Jailer, who was now a new brother in the Lord, took Paul and Silas to meet his family where they spoke the word of God to them and baptized them. He washed their wounds, and gave them a meal.

Paul likely insisted that they go back to the jail before dawn so that no harm would come to the Jailer for letting them escape. Paul also knew that because he was a Roman citizen, the magistrates would be in big trouble with Rome for allowing him to be publicly beaten without a trial.

35When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” 36The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.”

37But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

38The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.”

They were encouraged to leave the city, so after having a fellowship meeting at the home of Lydia, they encouraged the brethren and left.

The disciples had just experienced terrible injustices done to them. Much like the instance in Acts 12, when Herod had James killed by the sword and Peter imprisoned. Those disciples did not resist, react, protest or retaliate…they prayed! As a result Peter was miraculously freed from prison, and Herod was eaten by worms and died.

Here in Philippi, Paul rightfully spoke up about the injustice, but did not try to vindicate himself, or raise an indictment with Rome against the city officials.

 The chapter ends with v. 40 “they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.”

To Paul, the most important thing on his mind was this small fledgling church of new believers whom God was raising up in this city, NOT getting back at the magistrates for their injustice toward him, or seeking revenge.

His goal was not to hold those magistrates accountable to Roman law, it was to preach the gospel to each city and encourage the believers that were there.=

***That’s Acts, what about US?***

Often when we are feeling oppressed and persecuted, or we see injustice directed toward us or others, we want to react. We want to muster up any strength, influence or power we have and direct it toward the perceived perpetrator. We sometimes like to rouse up anger in others toward a common enemy and rally whatever resources we can influence to fight back.

This is not the what the apostles did here in Acts 16 (or Acts 12), and most often what we should not normally either. This does not mean that we should never speak up. Solomon tells us that there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak”. There is a time to react to injustices, sometimes that means speaking, sometimes acting, but it should always be done through the power of the Holy Spirit and never done as purely in anger as an action of reaction of the ”flesh”. James tells us this:

**James 1:20** “human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

We must never forget what the goal is for the great commission that Jesus gave us. It’s not that we go out and punish the wicked, or go out a make right every injustice, it’s that we go out and preach the gospel, make disciples and be His witnesses. This is our mission, our goal and the very thing God wants us to focus on. Anything else becomes a distraction.

One of the most important highlights of this chapter was in verse 29, when the Philippian Jailer,

“…rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

And they replied with the most important answer, “BELIEVE”!

v.31” *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!”*

**“Believe” –** [Gr. pisteuson (a form of pisteuo, one of two occurrences in the NT), it means: ***“put your complete trust in” ]***

Believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior, does not mean simply “acknowledging the existence of”, or “Agreeing with the concept of Jesus”

I means putting your faith and trust in Him, submitting to His Lordship and receiving salvation through Him.

This is the goal of the gospel, *that all might believe.*

***John 20:*31**  “these are written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that *by believing* you may have life in his name.”

Believing, putting our trust in Jesus, is not just what we do to get saved, it’s how we have life in His name every day of our lives. *It’s also* the message that He has asked us to preach to the world.

**Romans 10:9-14 “**If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10**For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. **11**As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” **12**For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, **13**for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

**14**How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

**Good Question; “they can’t”, unless “we do”!**

**We should never be afraid, ashamed or hesitant to preach the gospel,**

**because it is the power of God that brings salvation,**

**to everyone who believes!**