

*This character study / commentary into Apostle Paul is based mostly on Charles Swindoll's "Great Lives in God's Word" series on Paul and FF Bruce's "Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free." Main source materials are based on contents in these books unless otherwise noted.

Sunday June 11, 2023

Lesson 9: The Characteristics of an Evangelistic Mentality

Reference: Acts 16:11-40

When we last saw Paul, he had recruited a young Timothy to join his mission team, and had set out to spread the word about the decision made at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Paul would later receive a new mission objective from the Holy Spirit to take the gospel message into Macedonia, at which point, he welcomed Dr. Luke to join his team, as they set sail across the Aegean Sea into the Macedonian territory. The year was approximately AD 51.

Ministry in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40)

For their first stop into the new mission objective, Paul's team landed in Philippi, the leading city of that district in Macedonia (16:12). In Paul's time, Macedonia was divided into four separate districts, where Philippi was a prominent city in one of the districts. It was also designated as a Roman colony by Caesar Augustus. The city itself was established 400 years earlier, and was called Krenides until it was taken over by a rising Greek leader named Philip of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great), who in turned named the city after himself. When Rome made the city a Roman colony, it changed the culture to modeled that of Rome as an effort by Rome to attract Roman citizens – and specifically, its military veterans – into the city. This is why the city itself had a reputation of being referred to as "little Rome."

Paul's ministry in Philippi can be best categorized by his three evangelistic encounters: A prominent wealthy Gentile business woman named Lydia, a low-status demon-possessed unnamed slave girl, and a Roman official charged with keeping Paul and Silas in custody.

A Woman from Thyatira named Lydia (Acts 16:14-15)

Being predominantly a Greek-centric city dominated by Gentiles, there may not have been enough Jews in the city to constitute a synagogue; which is where the Jews would normally have congregated. Absence of a synagogue, the Jews would typically gather informally on the Sabbath near the river. This is why Luke cited that outside the city near the river, the team "expected to find a place of prayer" (16:13). Luke also cited that Paul began speaking to the women who had gathered there (16:13b), inferring that there weren't many (or any) men in the gathering that day.

On that day, listening to Paul's message was a wealthy businesswoman named Lydia. Luke described her as a "worshiper of God" (16:14), which was a common designation in the New Testament days for Gentiles who had embraced Judaism. Luke also added the language of "...members of her household..." to suggest that she was either single, divorced, or widowed, and is independently able to support herself and others as the head (i.e. independently wealthy). Her source of wealth would be as a dealer of purple cloth, which the Romans used often in clothing and tapestries to signify rank (i.e..in high demand).

Luke indicated that they "speak" to the women there, meaning that the message shared was not done in a preaching format, but more a conversation. Luke also gave credit to God for opening her heart – as well as the hearts of her household – to the "things spoken by Paul" (16:14).

A Low-Status, Demon-Possessed Slave Girl (Acts 16:16-21)

On a separate day, as Paul's team heads to the river to the place of prayer, they encountered a slave-girl who was possessed by a spirit of divination (lit. "python spirit"). In Paul's days, the "python spirit" was thought to

be a good and helpful spirit, but later in church history, it would be designated as evil and subject to exorcism. Luke identified her as a slave given that she had a master who was profiting off of the spirit (i.e..demon) who was speaking through her (16:16).

For many days after this encounter, the slave girl would follow behind Paul's ministry team, where the demon would heap praises to them and their mission objectives (16:17). After many days of tolerating this behavior, Paul finally spoke up and command the demon to leave the slave girl. From her master's perspective, this is bad for business. But from the girl's perspective, this was saving grace, as she is freed from the control of the demon.

The inference can be made that the girl desired to be freed from the spirit's control, thus approaches Paul's team daily. But the demon would not allow the girl to speak her own thoughts, prompting the demon to speak praises in order to avoid a confrontation. It may have taken Paul a few days to realize that the spirit was impure, thus, casting it out after a few days of tolerating such behavior.

The Roman Official Charged with Keeping Paul and Silas in Custody (Acts 16:31-40)

One would think that having a demon chased from the person it was possessing would be celebrated, but such was not the case, as doing so meant loss of business revenue from those profiting off of the slave girl's suffering (16:19). Since the slave girl's master could not speak truthfully about what actually happened (casting a spirit out of a person is not a crime, especially if the chief magistrate does not believe in spiritual matters), he had to make up a crime, accusing Paul and Silas to be radical Jews who were disrupting public peace. He was able to get support from others who evidently also lost out on the python spirit's fortune telling abilities (16:22). As a result, Paul and Silas was imprisoned for a crime they did not commit.

About midnight of the day they were imprisoned, Paul and Silas led what could be constituted as a worship service, singing hymns of praise to God and offering prayers while the other prisoners listened. Suddenly, an angel of the LORD shook the foundation of the facility, opening all the doors to the prison cell and unfastening everyone's chains (16:26). Effectively, this was an opening for all the prisoners to escape. However, none of the prisoners left, possibly convinced by Paul and Silas to stay in the cell.

Seeing the condition of the open cell doors and the chains left behind, the Roman guard naturally believed that the prisoners had all escaped. The penalty for allowing prisoners to escape is evidently more excruciating than death itself, prompting the Roman guard want to kill himself. However, his attempt to kill himself was stopped by Paul, who assured him that everyone is still in the cell (16:27). This behavior itself became an evangelistic opportunity that led the guard to salvation (16:30-34).

Paul and Silas both could have avoided jail altogether simply by citing their Roman citizenship status (16:37-39). It was clear that withholding this information was intentional, perhaps even divinely guided. Doing so allowed Paul and Silas to be among others who are seeking a path to salvation.

Analysis – Acts 16:11-40

As we read about Luke's chronicles of Paul's adventures, we should remember that Paul was given a new mission objective in Troas – to bring the gospel message westward into Gentile territory; in other words, to evangelize. Recall also that the ministry to the Gentiles was Paul's calling. This new objective was effectively a new harvest field for Paul. Whereas Paul originally set out on this trip to solidify churches on doctrinal matters, he now has to switch gears and embrace an evangelistic mindset that targets a very different audience, looking for evangelistic opportunities wherever he goes. He had originally set out to correct bad teachings, now he will simply be looking for opportunities to evangelize.

In Philippi, Paul's new evangelistic attitude can be observed in the following ways:

- He goes to the place where the seekers would gather (16:13 - by the river)
- He speaks to an audience who weren't the traditional targets (16:13 - the women)
- He speaks to the people, rather than preaching to the masses (16:13)
- He continues to let the Holy Spirit do the work of convicting (16:14)
- He engaged in practical ministry to help those in suffering (16:18 - acting on the authority of Christ to cast away demons, even as the demon was affirming his ministry).
- He evangelized with his living testimony, praising God even in midst of suffering (16:25)
- His practical ministry involves both doing and encouraging others to righteous acts (16:26-29)
- He uses his identity strategically (withheld his Roman citizenship status) for the purpose of reaching more seekers (16:37-39).

This new attitude and approach adopted by Paul allowed his ministry to save a Gentile woman's family by personal engagement, saved a girl from spiritual torment by acting on the authority of the Name of Christ, and saved the household of a Roman guard by being a living testimony to the LORD's righteousness. The key lesson to be learned from Paul's new evangelistic attitude is to recognize that, with a different audience that knows nothing of Scripture, a new evangelistic approach is needed that deviated from the spiritual norms.

As Christians, we should learn from Paul's actions and recognize that, when evangelizing, our language should be less Christianese, our approach should be less preaching, and more doing and helping. In evangelistic opportunities, it is our actions on display. As such, the following principles applies as it relates to an evangelistic mentality:

- **An evangelistic mentality requires a focus on the practical** – Unlike his previous mission trip with Barnabas, this new harvest field consists of people who knows little about the Jewish laws (OT) and practices (Tradition). Explaining Scripture to show Jesus is the Messiah would make little sense to this audience. Evangelism had to take on a different approach from a Scripture-based approach to being more practical, with living testimonies towards righteous living, and faith demonstrating a supernatural reliance (prayers) on spiritual sufferings.
- **An evangelistic mentality requires flexibility to agendas** – On the surface, it may seem that this trip into Macedonia lacked proper planning and organization, as Paul didn't have even the bare minimum knowledge of which cities they would visit. Verse 11-12 effectively says that they simply went to the place where there is people, and afterwards, they followed where the Spirit leads. This flexibility to the mission agenda and destinations will be highlighted more so as Paul's journey continues from Philippi, where Paul simply need to go, effectively, where the Spirit leads. In short, Evangelism takes place when we go to where the people are, and be flexible with our schedule and agenda by following where the Spirit leads.
- **An evangelistic mentality requires commitment to trust in the LORD** – Paul's adventure in Philippi was met with supernatural encounters at every stop – from the joy of witnessing the salvation at the river, to the taunting (backhanded compliment) of the demon surrounded by other witnesses, to the angelic act of causing the prison structure to shake / chains coming off. Each encounter challenges Paul to maintain his living testimony as an ambassador for Christ. He had to demonstrate his unwavering trust that God is in control, no matter the circumstance. Paul did so, epitomized by singing praises to God as both he and Silas were unjustly imprisoned and shackled. During evangelistic events, our actions as ambassadors for Christ are always on full display – especially as it relates to demonstrating our faith and trust in God no matter the circumstances.

Reflecting Upon the Word

Re-read Acts 16:11-40. This is the passage highlighting Paul's adventures evangelizing in the first city in Macedonia

1. Refer to the observations of Paul's evangelistic attitude on the previous page, what else can we observe as characteristics of an evangelistic attitude?
2. Paul tolerated a demon possessed slave girl for some time before he finally commanded the demon to leave the slave girl. Why did Paul not cast the demon out on their first encounter? What would be an evangelistic rationale for not casting the demon out immediately, given the circumstances that Paul was in?
3. Paul and Silas could have avoided jail time altogether simply by stating that they are Roman citizens. What are some of the reasons they chose to withhold that information until the next day?

Reflecting Upon our World

Consider how churches and parachurches today prepare individuals for missions and evangelism. Paul's approach to evangelism to the Greek nation starting in Philippi would very likely be met with much criticism today – given how so little planning was involved.

1. How does your church or parachurch leaders prepare your evangelistic mission team for a specific people group? What does the training program look like? What are the major focuses?
2. Does your planning and training sessions involve the possibility of encountering the demon possessed? What does that training program look like? Do you believe encountering demon possessed on evangelistic missions is real?
3. Does your planning and training sessions involve responses to persecution, to include the possibility of jail time?

Reflecting Upon Your Spiritual Journey

Reflect on your personal journey, focusing on how God put you in an evangelistic setting

1. Recount the last time God put you in a position to be evangelistic. How did you handle that situation? Did you cite Scripture? Or were you more practical? What did you learn about yourself and your relationship with God from that experience?
2. Reflect now on your current situation and relationship with God. If the Holy Spirit were to move you to join an evangelistic venture, how would you prepare yourself? What would be your focus? What would be "show stoppers" for you, if any?
3. Fundamentally, embracing an evangelistic attitude simply means to live out our spiritual life (relationship with God) in a manner that others can see. It is heavily focused on the practical, helping others to both see and experience the presence of God in your life and desiring to be part of your world. It requires commitment to live righteously, publically, as ambassadors for Christ.
 - a. Create a journal of your daily walk with God, and identify areas where you may need help from the Holy Spirit to root out hidden sins or unrighteous lifestyles
 - b. Take your daily journal entries to God in prayers
 - c. Begin to experience evangelistic living