

Place: Lurgan Baptist 8:11:2011

Reading: Acts 15:36 16:40

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

26. A Foothold in Europe

*For the apostle Paul, the church at Antioch was not a parking lot, it was a launching pad. Someone has said that wherever the apostle Paul went in his missionary travels the result was either a riot or a revival. Whether he caused a riot or a revival Paul never left any city the same. Whether he was preaching to the philosophers and intellectuals on Mar's Hill at Athens (17:22) or leading a humble jailor and his family to Christ at Philippi (16:31) Paul was always the same, a humble sacrificial servant-leader. It was in his heart and on his bowed back that the gospel of the grace of God was borne from Jerusalem to as much of " the uttermost part of the earth," (1:8) as he could get to before his time on earth was finished. Paul could never settle down to a " comfortable ministry," anywhere as long as there were open doors for the preaching of the gospel. Paul would have agreed enthusiastically with the words of Robertson McQuilken from his book " The Great Omission," " ***In a world in which nine out of every ten people are lost, three out of every four have never heard the way out, and one out of every two cannot hear, the church sleeps on. Could it be we think there must be some other way ? Or perhaps we don't really care that much.***" My Paul cared, and*

so should we. He and Barnabas returned home victoriously from the Council of Jerusalem, bringing with them the wonderful news that Gentile believers did not have to be circumcised or adopt a Jewish lifestyle to be saved. If the decision had gone the other way, evangelism of the Gentiles would have ended. But now the great apostle could not wait to get going again.

Paul's plan was to retrace those memorable steps of his first missionary journey, from Antioch to the island of Cyprus, traversing it from Salamis to Paphos, then sailing to Asia Minor and Pamphylia and travelling up into Galatia, visiting Iconium, Lystra, Perga, and Attalia. *These were worthy plans and he and Barnabas were a great team. They expected to follow up on the new believers, to reprove false doctrine, teach more about God's grace, share the results of the Jerusalem Council, build up the leadership in each church. My*

Paul and Barnabas were not willing to make the mistake so often made in modern-day evangelism, that of allowing converts to go their own way without follow up. However, to Paul's amazement, soon after he began, he found himself taking an unexpected leap across the Dardanelle Straits from Asia to Europe in obedience to a special call to Macedonia.

So important was this redirecting of Paul's life that the Pauline scholar Richard Longenecker says, " *Authentic turning points in history are few, but surely among them that of the Macedonian vision ranks high.*" They were momentous days when Columbus set sail from

Spain, or when Vasco Da Gama discovered the sea route to the West Indies, or when the Mayflower came to America in 1620 but my those were of little significance compared with this great event. Something happened that completely redirected Paul's ministry, keeping it in line with God's hidden agenda. Now as I have intimated before (Ch 13) to (Ch 21) focus on Paul's three missionary journeys.

- 1. The First Missionary Journey is found in (13:4-14:28)**
- 2. The Second Missionary Journey is found in (15:36-18:22)**
- 3. The Third Missionary Journey is found in (18:23-21:17)**

Now did you notice that this second missionary journey began with,

(1) A TIME OF VARIANCE

Have you noticed that the Bible never flatters its heroes ? One moment we read about David bravely slinging a stone at Goliath, the next we see him committing adultery with Bathsheba. We admire Peter when he leaves his nets to follow Jesus, but we shake our heads when he denies Christ on the eve of His crucifixion. You see Scripture paints its characters realistically, and that is good news. We can identify with these people in the Bible. They're just like us, "*men of like passions,*" (14:15) as we are. And if God can use them, He can use us too. At the end of (Ch 15) Luke reveals two co-workers clashing. These two

missionaries weren't plaster saints. They were fallible men who had headstrong opinions, opinions that sometimes clashed. The result ? They ended up parting ways, never to minister together again. My have you ever had a similar stomach-churning confrontation ? Most everyone has. Look at Paul and Barnabas here and notice,

(a) *THERE WAS ENERGETIC DEDICATION:*

Look if you will at (15:36) It was not as if Paul was bored in Antioch. Helping pastor a large, growing church, is a challenge even for most men. But Paul always felt keenly the call of unevangelised regions. It just was not in him to remain in one place very long when so many thousands still had not heard the gospel and he had been commissioned to reach them. He was a passionate man, driven by a desire to preach the gospel especially where it had yet to be proclaimed. My that passion was the result of love for God and commitment to obedience. It led Paul to write, "*For necessity is laid upon me, yea woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.*" (1Cor 9:16) He loved the work of the Lord, because he so loved the Lord whose work it was. He wants to traverse the old preaching grounds so as to succour his spiritual children.

Is this not an element frequently missing in contemporary evangelism ? There is too often failure to show enough love to those led to Christ. The modern conception of an evangelist is someone who travels from city to city preaching the gospel, leaving his converts to be followed up by others. But Paul did

not do that. He saw his responsibility as not only proclaiming the gospel but also establishing churches and maturing new converts in the faith. It was not in Paul's heart to win people to Christ and then allow them to struggle on their own. ***He was a spiritual paediatrician as well as an obstetrician.*** He wanted to return and make sure the new believers he left behind were growing in the Lord and being built up in their faith. My ... is this the pattern we follow ? Or do we leave new converts to fend for themselves ? Paul and Barnabas had worked well together on that first missionary journey and certainly the two missionaries did not expect what was about to happen for notice,

(b) THERE WAS EMPHATIC DISAGREEMENT:

Can you imagine their conversation ? Barnabas says, “ *I'll get the maps and buy our tickets.* ” “ *Okay,* ” says Paul. “ *I'll send word ahead to let them know we're coming.* ” “ *And I'll tell John Mark to start packing. Just think it'll be the three of us again this is going to be great.* ” Paul drops his quill and stares at Barnabas.

“ *John Mark ? He's not coming. No sir ! Not John Mark.* ” At the heart of their disagreement is this issue. Should someone who defected be given a second chance ? Barnabas says yes, Paul says no. Now the word “ *contention,* ” in (15:39) is an interesting word.

It means “ *sharp disagreement.* ” (*paroxusmos*) Their partnership dissolved not amicably but with violent emotions. Who was right ? Paul or Barnabas ? Well, the weight of the evidence favours Paul, for it

was he and Silas that were commended by the church. (15:40 You see, Barnabas was called “ *the son of encouragement,* ” in the early church (4:36) because he was such a people person. Paul, however, was goal oriented, not allowing any person to stand in the way of accomplishing the mission. And both are necessary. Paul looked at people and asked, “ **What can they do for God's work ?** ” while Barnabas looked at people and asked, “ **What can God's work do for them ?** ” Both questions are important to the Lord's work, and sometimes it is difficult to keep things balanced. The truth is, even the best Christians do not always agree. Sometimes good Christians intensely disagree, for all of us walk with limps. My some of the church's greatest leaders have been difficult people.

Luther in a famous self-evaluation said, “ ***I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether war-like, fighting against innumerable monsters and devils. I am born for the removing of stumps and stones, cutting away thistles and thorns and clearing wild forests.*** ”

This was a rather sober evaluation, but Luther was not exaggerating. He could indeed be a difficult man. He was also one of God's princes. My ... even godly people will not always agree. So the unthinkable happened, and Paul and Barnabas agreed to disagree and went their separate ways of ministry for Christ. The result of it all was that,

(c) THERE WAS EVANGELISTIC DEVELOPMENT:

Look at (15:39-40) This is the last glimpse Luke gives us of Barnabas, one of the noblest figures in the New Testament. In leaving Paul, Barnabas was separating himself from the greatest servant of Christ in all time. And Paul was losing the man to whom he owed more than any other human being. When Barnabas sailed away with John Mark to his native Cyprus, he sailed into further fruitful ministry, but out of history. In contrast, the continuing ministry of Paul and Silas is well-known. My God changes His workmen, but His work goes right on. Now there were two missionary teams instead of one. *You see, while God did not cause the disagreement or the fateful separation, He used it to guide both men into increased fruitfulness and service.*

Moreover, Silas brought to Paul's ministry some ingredients that Barnabas did not have. He was a Roman citizen (16:37) he was a prophet (15:32) he probably spoke Greek (15:22, 32) Though Barnabas was a great loss, my Silas was a great gain.

My it's often through our failures and difficulties that God leads us to increased creativity and productivity. Philips Brooks, one of the greatest preachers U.S.A. has ever produced failed miserably as a schoolteacher. He did not like his students, and they did not like him. Brooks wrote when he was fired, "*I do not know what will become of me and I do not care much I wish I were fifteen years old again. I believe I might become a stunning man: but somehow or other I do not seem in the way to come to much now.*" Anyone who has seen his statue in front of Holy Trinity in the city of Boston knows that spiritual

greatness came out of his personal failure as he yielded to God's redirection in his life. (1)

(2) A TIME OF VISITATION

Do you recall that on the first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas had entered Asia Minor via the island of Cyprus ? (13:4) But with Barnabas and John Mark already there (15:39) there was no point in Paul and Silas heading that way. Paul chose instead to travel through Syria and Cilicia thus entering Galatia from the opposite direction. No doubt Paul founded many of the churches there, and as they travelled through those areas they were busy with their priority, strengthening the churches. My this was a time of visitation, and this visitation involved,

(a) *THE GROOMING OF A NEW CONVERT:*

For just, as Silas had replaced Barnabas, so Timothy replaced John Mark. Timothy was probably saved through Paul's first visit to Lystra for Paul calls him, " my beloved son," (1 Cor 4:17) and "*my own son in the faith.*" (1 Tim 1:2) He undoubtedly witnessed Paul's sufferings in Lystra (14:19-20 2 Tim 3:10) and was drawn by the Lord to the apostle. You see, just as Paul was touched by the stoning of Stephen (7:58) so had Timothy perhaps been touched by the stoning of Paul. (14:19-20) Timothy name means "*dear to God,*" and not only was Timothy dear to the Lord he became very close to the apostle as well. My what Paul had seen lacking in John Mark, he found in Timothy who had a good reputation among the

believers in the area and was willing to stay by his side on the road. (1 Cor 9:19-23) You see, Paul longed to groom a younger man to carry on the ministry, and Timothy was the perfect choice. Indeed he became Paul's most trusted young protégé. It's very interesting that when Paul writes to Timothy he exhorts him to be to others what Paul had been to him. (2 Tim 2: 1-2) During Timothy's many years of close association with Paul he had heard divine truth which the Lord had revealed through the apostle. Timothy was now to take that divine revelation which he had learned from Paul and teach it to other faithful men, men with proven spiritual character and giftedness, who would in turn pass on those truths to another generation. My from Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others encompasses 4 generations of godly leaders. And that process of spiritual reproduction, which began in the early church is to continue until the Lord returns.

My what kind of spiritual legacy are we leaving to those behind us ? Let me speak to the leadership, specifically the eldership. **As a corporate body of overseers what spiritual legacy are you men going to leave to this assembly ? Do you want it to continue to be the place where Biblical standards are being upheld ? Where the Word will be preached in all its purity and fidelity ? Well, what are you doing to see that goal achieved ? My are we grooming others to take our places ? Are we nurturing young men for leadership ?** There was (a) and then there was,

(b) THE GROUNDING OF NEW CHURCHES:

Look if will at (16:4-5) The word “ *established*,” in the Greek means “ *to make firm or solid*,” and it, along with the verb, is in the imperfect tense. This tells us that the believer's spiritual muscles were continually being built up and the numbers continually multiplying.

(6:7 9:31 12:24) My the missionaries were spreading the liberating truth affirmed at the Jerusalem Council, that salvation was wholly by God's grace ! It was certainly a most successful hour, but I wonder if any of the believers asked about Barnabas ? And what did Paul tell them ? My at every turn the Lord was pushing doors open for the gospel, but suddenly, open doors became closed doors. And for this missionary team it was,

(3) A TIME OF VAGUENESS

Two of the most mysterious phrases in the book of Acts are found in (Ch 16) Look at (16:6-7) When Paul finished his ministry in Galatia, he decided to go south and minister in Asia (not the continent of Asia, but a small province called Asia where Ephesus was located)

But something stopped him. Then he tried to go North into Bithynia so that he could minister in the prosperous cities around the Black Sea. But again he was hindered. The overall effect was to funnel him directly west toward the Dardanelle Straits and into Europe. Paul and his missionary team were actually driven west by closed doors. My have you discovered that sometimes the Holy Spirit constrains

us and sometimes the Holy Spirit restrains us ? You see,

(a) THE HOLY SPIRIT RESTRAINED THEIR SPEECH:

“ They were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia.” (16:6) The word “ *forbidden*,” in Greek is derived from “ *kolos*,” an older word that means “ *to cut short*,” “ *to lop*,” or “ *to trim*.” In a sense, the missionaries forged ahead in one direction, and the Holy Spirit cut them off. They went another way, they were cut off again. Like mice in a maze, they wandered from here to there, not able to settle or minister anywhere in Phrygia or Galatia. My everything had been going so smoothly on this second missionary journey that these closed doors must have come as a great surprise. However, it is comforting to know that even apostles were not always clear as to God’s will for their ministries. You see, God planned for the message to get there another time. But this time, (a) and then,

(b) THE HOLY SPIRIT RESTRAINED THEIR STEPS:

Look if will at (16:7) Specifically, how did the Holy Spirit restrain them ? Was it through the bestowing or removing of a subjective sense of peace ? Possibly. Or possibly it was through difficult circumstances or illness, or through the utterance of a Christian prophet, perhaps Silas himself. (15:32) Whatever, try as they may God was blocking their efforts. Was it for lack of

needy people in these regions ? On the contrary, these men and women needed Christ too. My do you believe the need constitutes the call ? *Well, Paul was blocked from going to two different regions where there was definitely a need. Asia and Bithynia. But neither was the place where God wanted Paul to serve so he was blocked from going there.* The Lord was restraining His messengers and His message. My are you searching for God’s will and finding nothing but closed doors ? Maybe you long to sense God’s power and discover new vistas of blessing, but no matter which door you try, nothing clicks open. And you’re still stumbling and groping along like Paul in a dry, barren Asia. You see, God sometimes shuts down exciting ministries or allows obstacles in our paths like sickness, financial difficulties, job failure, or a relationship breakdown. At times like these, its so easy to become frustrated or disheartened. We can’t imagine why God would shut some of the doors that He does. So we try to explain it saying, “ *Maybe we just made a mistake maybe we need to try harder.*” But my when Christ closes a door, He merely has His sights on something better. You see, closed doors are not the end but the beginning of God’s new dream for us. For when a good door closes, a better door opens. Do you recall the words of the psalmist, “ *No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.*” (Ps 84:11)

God truly has our good in mind and is willing to open doors for us in His time, for when Christ closes a door, He merely has His sights on something better, something around the bend we can’t see yet. For Paul,

that something was Europe. For this was

(4) A TIME OF VISION

For passing through Mysia Paul and his companions, finally arrive in Troas, a city on the western edge of Asia that overlooks the Aegean Sea.

My God has blocked them from going north, south, east, so here they stand with their toes in the sand, at Asia's westernmost point. Who were they to witness to here ? The fish. There's nothing to do, except wait on the Lord and get some rest and while they sleep " *A vision appeared to Paul in the night come over into Macedonia and help us.*" (16:9) Now I want you to notice the pronoun " **we,**" in (16:10) for Dr. Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, joined Paul and his party in Troas. There are three " **we sections,**" in Acts, (16:10-17 20:5-15 27:1 ... 28:16) Luke changed from, " *we,*" to " *they,*" in (17:1) which suggests that he may have remained in Philippi to pastor the church after Paul left. The next " **we section,**" begins in (20:5) in connection with Paul's trip from Macedonia. Luke devoted a good deal of space to Paul's ministry in Philippi, so perhaps he was resident of that city. Some students think that Luke may have been the man Paul saw in the vision.

My whatever the vision encompassed, its meaning was clear. Europe was calling for help the people of Europe needed the gospel of Christ. (4) Now did you notice,

(a) **HOW PERSONAL IT WAS:**

" *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.*" (16:9) Peter had a similar vision and his vision sent him to the Gentiles, to a European, to Cornelius the Roman, and it opened the door of the church to the world. Paul's vision sent him into Europe, to the Greeks, and it opened the door of the world to the church.

(b) **HOW PRECISE IT WAS:**

" *Come over into Macedonia,*" (16:9) Macedonia was across the Aegean Sea on the mainland of Greece. My here was a call that would stir the very depths of Paul's soul. To preach in the cities of Alexander the Great, and Philip of Macedon, to preach in the land of Plato and Aristotle and Pythagoras and Archimedes and Homer and Socrates. Why **that** was a mission field indeed. To preach to the Greeks, who had given the world culture, art, sport, democracy, oratory, ideas. What a mission field. Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, even Athens itself ! My do you have a vision of a lost world ? Do you hear the cry of the perishing, " *come over into and help us.*" You see,

(c) **HOW PRACTICAL IT WAS:**

" *Come over into Macedonia and help us,*" (16:9) Do you recall Paul's words to the church at Galatia ? " *As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" (Gal 6:10) My the greatest help we can give to our fellow-man, is give them the gospel. That's what this missionary team did. The phrase " *assuredly*

gathering,” is an old Greek verb that means “*to bring together or to knit together.*” You see, as Luke and Paul and company considered the vision in the context of all that had gone before, it all came together and they knew that God was calling them to Europe. My this was one of the great turning points of history and we should thank God for it, for as a result the gospel has come to us in the West. From Troas to Neapolis, the port city of Philippi was a distance of about 150 miles. Philippi lay some 8-10 miles inland from Neapolis. It was a Roman colony taking its name in 356 BC from Philip the Second of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Philippi was a favoured city of Rome, as a great victory in the second Roman civil war was won there in 42 BC. Being a Roman colony, meant that it was a “***Rome away from Rome.***” The Emperor organised “*colonies,*” by ordering Roman citizens, especially retired military people, to live in selected areas so there would be strong pro-Roman cities in these strategic areas. Though living on foreign soil, the citizens were expected to be loyal to Rome, to obey the laws of Rome, and to give honour to the Roman Emperor. In return they were given certain political privileges, one of which was exemption from taxes. My Rome did not know it, but the flag of the Gospel was unfurled in the Empire that day, and the Omnipotent Christ was about to win many to himself. G. Campbell Morgan wrote

“ How little the world knows of the Divine Movements. Rome had small idea that day, that the van of the army of its ultimate Conqueror had taken possession of one of its frontal defences. On the day

Paul hurried from Neapolis, over the eight miles up to Philippi and came into the city and made arrangements for his own lodging the flag was planted in a frontier colony of Rome, which eventually was to make necessary the lowering of her flag, and the change of the world's history.” You see this was,

(5) A TIME OF VICTORY

Can you picture this missionary quartet ? Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke going to the Gangites River looking for some fellow Jews ? My this was a divine appointment. For,

(a) A CULTURED SINNER WAS SAVED:

God selected Lydia, and like a flower her heart and the hearts of her family or household were opened to the Saviour. They were all baptised right on the spot in the Gangites River. (16:14-15) Can you see the biblical pattern here ? Salvation is followed immediately by baptism. We see this consistently throughout the book of Acts. Though baptism plays no part in our salvation, its an outward evidence of an inner transformation that has taken place. Tell me, have you confessed the Lord through baptism ? My Paul didn't baptise her because she was a God fearer. She was baptised because of her conversion, her personal faith in Jesus Christ as her Saviour from sin. If you have never placed your faith in Christ the way Lydia did now would be a good time to do so.

What an astounding spiritual success. God opened the heart of one woman in a colonial extension of Rome, and that city became a mighty beachhead for God. (a) The apostles now had the wind at their backs, God was graciously working, but Satan was at work too. In this case, he used a demonised girl who had made her masters wealthy by telling fortunes and as Paul and his team went regularly to the place of prayer, this girl repeatedly shouted after them, “*These men are the servants of the most High God who show us the way of salvation.*” (16:17) The Greek actually says, “*These men are proclaiming a way of salvation.*” In other words she was saying, “*You have a way of salvation, we have a way of salvation let’s join forces.*” In this way Satan could siphon Christ’s group into his own

Pastor Kent Hughes says. “The poor girl was demonized filled with a demon or demons who revealed the future to her clients. She was a clairvoyant owned by spiritual pimps who sold her metaphysical powers. Satan’s strategy was obvious to derail the gospel by infiltrating it, by forming an apparent alliance with Christ’s work, for his own ends of course. He loves to distort the gospel just enough to twist it into a deadly heresy.” My she was a danger to the progress of the gospel and so Paul responded decisively and cast out this wicked spirit. Thus,

(b) A CAPTIVE SINNER WAS SAVED:

My there’s a principle we need to grasp here. In every major breakthrough there is a corresponding resistance. For every step forward the devil will meet

you half-way. But bless God, “*Greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world.*” (1 Jn 4:4) Paul and Silas were now in trouble because they had exorcised the girl’s owner’s source of income. You see, whenever the preaching of the gospel touches the economic structure of the powers that be, opposition is bound to come. The result ? Imprisonment. Can you see Paul and Silas now ? Their hands are tied, their feet are fastened, their backs are bleeding, all for telling others about Jesus. Did they complain ? Did they feel sorry for themselves ? Did they wonder why God called them to Macedonia only to be beaten and thrown into jail ? Not so. “*And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God and the prisoners heard them.*”

(16:25) I mean their attitude in the face of suffering spoke volumes to those who observed them. They had peace in the midst of pain. I wonder in your “prison circumstances,” are you making an impact on others ? In the midst of your trials are you showing a peace that the world knows nothing about ? (Job 35:10) The outcome of it all was,

(c) A CALLOUS SINNER WAS SAVED:

The jailor was saved physically but he was also saved spiritually. He asked, “What must I do to be saved ?” (16:30) And the answer was simple for him and for you and me, “*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ saved.*” (16:31) My are you saved ? Here were three people from widely differing backgrounds and ways of life, who experienced the power of the gospel. (Rom 1:16) Different people with different

experiences, and yet all of them changed by the grace of God. **Tell me, are you not glad that the gospel came to Europe in AD 49 ?** Yet look at Europe tonight. Dark spiritually, depraved morally, and destitute materially. I wonder do we see the vision ? Do we hear the cry ? “ *Come over and help us ?* “ Do we sense the call ? Others just like those in Philippi are waiting to be told God’s simple plan of salvation. Will you help them hear ?