

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Second Missionary Journey

Readings: Acts 15:36-18:11

Reflections:

- **Second missionary journey:** This secondary journey captures a great deal of important events in the life of Paul. Many of these stories are vital to understanding the nature of leadership and how God works in surprising ways through very human people. It begins with the division of Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. Then two very important leaders join Paul's team on this journey, Timothy and Luke. Both are probably very young but will become very influential leaders. We also see how Paul continues his irreligious revolution and the various groups confronted by the Good News. This journey captures many stories that Christian leaders over the centuries have returned to again and again to understand the realities of serving in leadership.
- **Paul and Barnabas separate:** This is a fascinating story. Barnabas took a big risk reaching out to Saul of Tarsus and God used him to mentor and establish Saul/Paul. Now he wants to invest again in a risky young leader named John Mark and Paul says no way. Paul wants a team he can count on. Probably hindsight proves that in a sense both were right. John Mark turns into a key leader in the church and the first one to write a biography of Jesus apparently from his interactions with Peter (according to church tradition). Paul goes on to establish a very effective team in reaching the Roman world. Do they reconcile? Yes apparently. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:11, "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." Sometimes division can be caused by two sets of gifting needing to part ways and pursue two different objectives. The important thing is to remain committed to reconciling the relationship. Here Paul and Barnabas show their humanity and yet commitment to Christ. They struggle but finally work it out. The Bible doesn't hide the struggles and failures of leaders.
- **Timothy joins Paul and Silas:** Timothy joins Paul's team now as a young man and becomes one of the early church's future leaders. Here we see Paul prioritize leadership development and investing in the future. The most significant thing about this passage is that Paul circumcises Timothy because of the Jews. Imagine Timothy's commitment to the cause of Christ! We must notice this about Paul. He will argue vehemently that no man needs to be circumcised to follow Christ and that it means nothing to your

relationship with Christ. Yet, on his leadership team he will circumcise Timothy so that they as a team can talk to the Jews without being immediately labeled. So circumcision has no value for a person before God but if you are a leader and you are trying to reach religious people you at times may have to submit to religious rules to be able to get close enough to them to tell them that none of the religious rules matter. Paul later will argue for women being silent in their home church meetings. This is a cultural concession so that spiritual seekers will not be offended but will have a chance to hear the message. Paul will teach this even though in Christ there is no male or female. Unless we understand Paul's principle of adapting to cultural contexts so as to win a hearing for the message, we will be confused by his approach and teaching.

- Churches are strengthened: We see that when a church is healthy, it grows.
- Vision Macedonian call: Interestingly we see here that the Spirit blocks Paul from going towards Asia. In fact it says that it is the Spirit of Jesus. The Father, Son and Spirit again we see are interrelated in their personhood that the Spirit is equally of the Father as it is of the Son. Finally God gives him direction at night through a dream (night vision) of a man from Macedonia begging for them to come help them. Paul had faith that this was God directing them where to go.
- Lydia converted in Philippi: Interestingly it is a woman not a man who meets them. Paul's team goes to a place of prayer and meets Lydia who was apparently wealthy and served the wealthy. Purple cloth was expensive due to the rare nature of the dye and a luxury. She and her household were baptized and so we see again the important role women play in the advance of the kingdom.
- Evil spirit removed: Paul confronts religion again, this time magical religion, as a slave girl under the influence of an unclean spirit is used to predict the future. She made a lot of money for her owners. Remember religion is often about acquiring wealth rather than giving it away. She follows behind Paul and what she says is actually true but how she says it is either mocking or annoying. She is trying to associate herself with these men and blur the lines between the kingdom of God and her own magical spirituality. Satan always loves to try to associate with the work of God to either be validated or to confuse. Paul finally casts the spirit out and demonstrates the spiritual authority all Christ-followers have through Jesus.
- Paul and Silas imprisoned: The slave owners are furious they lost their income and so they seize Paul and his team under the charge of throwing the city into an uproar. The irreligious revolution always starts an uproar! Paul and Silas end up flogged and imprisoned in stock in the inner cell. It doesn't get any more secure than that!
- Philippian jailer converted: Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns when an earthquake hits to set them free. The jailer believes he will be executed because he allowed the prisoners to escape but Paul and Silas save him from doing this as none of the prisoners used this chance to escape. Here we see Paul demonstrate complete trust

in God as well as enemy love. Rather than running to save their lives, they choose rather to save their enemy's life. As Paul demonstrates love to this man, he and his household come to faith and as a result take care of Paul and his team. The best way to wipe out an enemy is to make them your friend. That is what enemy love is all about!

- Paul and Silas released: The magistrates decide to let Paul and Silas go. They were trying to intimidate Paul and Silas through the flogging and imprisonment but Paul will not be intimidated. Paul demands justice as he is a Roman citizen and was not given a trial. The magistrates are now humbled and Paul and his team is given respect. We see Paul's courage and fearlessness. He wants the message of Jesus to be respected and so he acts in a way that requires respect.
- Teaching in Thessalonica: Paul preaches here and will soon write them a letter as a follow up to his work in the city. We see that some Jews, many Greeks and a number of prominent women join the movement. This is a normal pattern for Paul during this time. We see again the value placed on women. They are highlighted!
- Attack on Jason's house: Here we see again the controversial nature of the kingdom. To declare Jesus as Lord was to at the same time declare Caesar is not Lord. The religious revolution causes great turmoil and comes at a high cost when the message is clearly proclaimed. Jason is not beaten but he must post bond.
- Good reception at Berea: Paul and his team must escape in the night for fear of greater persecution. The Bereans demonstrate a passion to know the truth and so they dug into the study of Scripture. We see the value of doing excellent study of the Scriptures and ensuring that truth that is taught is well founded and grounded in the facts. Faith does not avoid or deny the facts but once the facts have been uncovered, it does then push us towards trusting relationship. The Bereans were passionate to know the truth and they took the time to study it for themselves. Again a few Jews, many Greeks and prominent women and men believe. Women are again highlighted as important people joining the movement.
- Agitators force departure: Religious troublemakers from Thessalonica come over and cause Paul grief so that he has to depart. Timothy and Silas stay a bit longer but Paul leaves for his own safety. We see that religious people are not content to live within their own religious world but they love to go out and cause problems for those seeking to have a relationship with God apart from religion.
- With philosophers in Athens: The irreligious revolution continues as Paul now confronts intellectual religion – Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The city of Athens was filled with idols and was the center of Greek culture and thought. Paul teaches publically and then finally is brought by the crowd of listeners to a public teaching area that was managed by a council of intellects. This council and the teaching area were called the Areopagus. This intellectual debate was highly valued within Athens and so Paul now must confront intellectual religion.

- Sermon about “the unknown God”: This sermon captures for us how Paul would teach to the Greeks about Jesus. It is radically different from how he would speak to the Jews.
 - Paul is looking to affirm their spirituality as a sign of their quest for God. He does not condemn them.
 - He looks for a bridge of understanding, some aspect of their spirituality that can be used as a pointer towards God or Jesus.
 - He starts with truth they will readily accept before introducing new truth;
 - He shows he knows their own sacred writings and rather than using his own sacred writings he starts with their sacred writings. In fact he attributes a statement about Zeus to God. In other words, he assumes that behind their concept of Zeus is their attempt to connect with the one true God.
 - He does challenge their basic religious understanding by declaring that God does not want people to worship idols and yet he does this within a context of respect. Paul shows that he is looking for every chance to cultivate a common understanding so that people can grasp who Jesus is.
- Crowd’s reaction: Some mocked but others wanted to hear more. We see a prominent man and woman are named among those who believe. They most likely were people within the church of that city who were now key leaders and still prominent people of influence in the city. In fact, Dionysus was a member of the council of the Areopagus.
- Aquila and Priscilla: Paul and his team moves on to Corinth where they meet a couple who will become significant leaders in the church. They are Jews from Italy and tentmakers by trade. Paul and this couple form a bond as Paul works and teaches in Corinth. Luke records this connection to help the readers understand how the relationships were formed among the leaders of the Jesus movement.
- Unbelieving Jews: Silas and Timothy now rejoin Paul and enable him to focus exclusively on teaching as they apparently take over the responsibilities to earn money to keep bread on the table. The Jews of that city become increasingly abusive and so Paul shakes the dust off his clothes (a sign of complete separation) and moves from the synagogue next door to the house of Justus, a Greek who believes in God. This would be Paul’s new place to teach.
- Many Jews accept the Gospel: Even with this said, Crispus, the key leader of the synagogue and his household become Christ-followers. Paul again has a dream (night vision) and this time God encourages him to continue to teach in this city: “Do not be afraid, keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” This encouragement results in another eighteen months of Paul teaching in that city. Many people in leadership need this kind of encouragement to remain focused and committed in their

context of ministry. It is very easy to get discouraged and want to give up. God knows this and he wants to continue to encourage us as we listen to him and wait on him.

