

The Second Missionary Journey
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We are going to be...today we're gonna be looking at Acts chapters 16 through 18, getting into Paul's second missionary journey. And as we look at it I think something that sticks out...we're going to kind of do an overview of this second missionary journey today. And something that sticks out to me as I read it, as I look at it, as I've spent time just looking over it this past week is how it truly is an illustration of something that can happen with someone when they are responding to the Holy Spirit. And what we see is this played out in Paul's life. But I'd like to go ahead and begin with a word of prayer first. So please join me in prayer.

Holy Father,

I just ask that You would make Your presence felt here. I ask that you would give me a clarity of mind, a clarity of speech; that You would help us to see Your word. And LORD, I ask that You would help our minds to understand what our ears hear. God, help our hearts to hold onto it. And LORD, I ask that You would help me just to communicate clearly, have a clarity of thought, a clarity of speech. LORD, I pray this in Your name. Amen.

Ok. As we turn to Acts 16 and 18 what we'll see is that there is a sense of where Paul is responding to the Holy Spirit over the course of this whole missionary journey. The journey summary—it's a pretty simple thing. He travels over the course of two or three years around twenty years after Jesus Christ was crucified. He ends up traveling about twenty-eight hundred [2,800] miles throughout the Mediterranean. He covers what is now modern-day Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Palestine as well. He actually spends most of his time, however, in what is modern-day Greece. And that's part of what we'll look at here as an interesting thing. And I'll walk you through his journey real quick as kind of an overview summary just to give you an idea of exactly what happened.

He started off, and on the first leg of his journey it covers it pretty quickly, the narration, the narrator does. In the first five verses of Acts chapter 16 he talks about how Paul started off on his journey. He gets to a little place where he meets a young man named Timothy in this...it's just a small town, Lystra, Iconium...a couple of small towns that are circled there [refers to Powerpoint slide]. And he ends up meeting this young man named Timothy. It's a divine appointment. It's something that Paul and Timothy...they both look at each other, it clicks; we have a teacher...a mentor and a disciple, and they just click, and Paul says, 'I'd like for you to go with me on the remainder of my journey.' And so Timothy does, and this is the beginning of a lifelong relationship between this mentor and his student, his disciple.

They set out from there, and Paul's agenda was...he was planning on traveling primarily through Asia and into churches that he had been to before to check up on people that he had led to Christ, to go and to share the gospel in a few new places in Asia. And what ends up happening is an interesting thing. We see in Acts 16:6 that when Paul gets into Asia, he and Timothy and the other companions with him, for whatever reason the Holy Spirit forbids them to share the gospel. They go into Asia, into Phrygia and Galatia, these two parts of Asia, and they are planning on telling people about Jesus. And for whatever reason, the Holy Spirit forbids them. It's kind of a confusing thing, and the scripture doesn't tell us exactly how that happened. I don't know if the Holy Spirit somehow closed Paul's mouth, where he got mute; I don't know if just every door of opportunity closed where they didn't really have anybody to talk to who would listen; I don't know if they had visions that said 'Hey, you're not supposed to be here.' Maybe it was just a vague sense of unsettledness and a lack of peace about being there. I don't know. The scripture doesn't tell us. All that it does tell us is that they left there and they moved through because the Holy Spirit forbid them to share the gospel, which is kind of a confusing thing considering this is someone on a missionary journey.

Well, they go on and they get into Mysia, and again what ends up happening, in verse 7, is the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus—forbids them; He doesn't permit them to share the gospel there either. He doesn't open doors; he doesn't open opportunities; He kind of shuts things down. At this point, if I'm Paul, personally...I mean, at this point he's traveled several hundred, close to a thousand miles by foot, I'd be sitting here questioning, 'God, what in the world is going on? I know that I'm supposed to go on this missionary, had this awesome thing where I meet up with this guy Timothy, and he's a really awesome, neat student. We're clicking, things are going well. What in the world is goin' on?'

And it's as though the Holy Spirit just has this cattle prod here, just proddin' him along—'Keep goin', keep goin', keep goin'.' And Paul...he doesn't know where he's headed at this point. All he knows is 'this isn't it, and I'm supposed to keep going.'

And they finally get to Troas, and this is what's interesting is in verses 9 and 10 of chapter 16. He ends up getting to Troas. And while he's in Troas he has this vision. And this vision is of someone who's from Macedonia, a man from Macedonia—Greece, Achaia, that part of what is modern-day Greece. And this man says, in this vision, 'Please, come over here. Tell us about the gospel. Tell us about God. We want to know.' And at this point Paul wakes up and he tells his companions about it, and they come to the conclusion, 'Yes, that is where God has called us to go. That's where we're supposed to be.' This whole time God's been sittin' here with this cattle prod, pushin' 'em across Asia because He wants Paul to hurry up and get to where He wants him to be. Even though Paul wasn't setting out when he left Antioch to go to Greece, that's where the Spirit ended up leading him.

Now, it's interesting in terms of it's something you really need to pay attention to simply because of the fact that this all happens in the first ten verses. That means that basically nothing of note that was worth telling us about, really, other than the fact that the Spirit kept pushing 'em and pushing and pushing 'em to get here is of note of the first thousand miles of that twenty-eight hundred miles or so of that whole journey. So what in the world happened? What was so special about getting' here in Macedonia? Well, let's look at what happens when Paul finally gets there.

The first place he goes is Philippi. And Philippi...basically the story of what happens in Philippi takes the whole next thirty verses of chapter 16. This is like saying, ok, this little town and this small amount of time that you spend in this town, makes so much more difference in understanding how God is working, and everything else, than all of those other ten verses, thousand miles, whatever came prior. And what ends up happening in Philippi is something that would be startling to me, personally. He gets there, and Philippi is the center of military power in the region. It had been a colony where several Roman veterans, veterans of the Roman army...they got out, they got their retirement, they would be settled there. In many ways it kind of had the feel of a metropolitan frontier sort of a mix where it was something that was a metropolitan center leading city, but also it had a heavy concentration of veterans and people who had been all over the place, all over the empire. It was situated on this main highway between Rome and Byzantium, modern-day Constantinople/Istanbul, that area.

And so Paul gets there, he meets some people, and he starts sharing the gospel. Before long, people in the town get upset. And all of a sudden Paul finds himself beaten and wrongfully imprisoned. He gets the tar beat out of him with just rods; and then, without a trial, on trumped up charges, he gets thrown in jail. If I'm Paul, personally at this point, I'm wonderin' what in the world is goin' on. I'm about ready to hang up this whole missionary thing, personally. I've just hiked all the way across Asia, and I don't understand why... Sure, I come here and there's some people who find out about Jesus. But then I get beaten and wrongfully imprisoned? Without even a fair trial? What's that about?

Of course, what ends up happening is God works a miracle there and the jailor and his family end up coming to Christ, too. It's almost as though God wanted to hurry up and send him there, and have him go all that way just so he could hurry up and have an appointment in the jail, being wrongfully imprisoned with this jailor so that he could come to know God.

Of course...we'll go on real quick here and look at what else happens in this area. The second part of the journey ends up taking him to Thessalonica. And it tells about what happened in Thessalonica in the first nine verses or so of Acts chapter 17. Thessalonica was an up-and-coming city. It was a prominent city in that area. It was the center of trade and commerce; had a couple of main arteries, trade arteries, going through it. It had that same main east-west highway going from Rome to Byzantium. But then it also had a north-south leading route that kind of had north-south traffic leading through the region. And so it became a center of trade and commerce, and a very well-off city. But the interesting thing is Paul gets here, and he's not here for very long. In fact, all we know of is that he was there for three Saturdays, three Sabbaths. We don't know that he was there for any longer than that.

It wasn't too long after that that what ends up happening is that people in that area start getting upset because, again, he's telling people about Jesus. And people are becoming Christians, and they're turning away from other religions. And so they stir things up, and he gets run out of town. And some of the people who are left end up getting hauled in to appear before governors and all kinds of things like that, and have to answer to civil authorities.

So, at this point Paul has been beaten up and wrongfully imprisoned. He's been run out of another town in a matter of weeks. And this may not seem to be a very successful missionary journey in many ways...except for the fact that we already have two strong churches that will flourish, and Paul will later write letters to, and we get to study about and learn from. And it's the beginning of the church, of the gospel spread into Europe. This is where the first European Christians came from. Paul is beginning to make inroads for the gospel into western culture and society, leading all the way up to us today.

Paul goes on, and what he ends up doing is from here he goes down to Athens. Now Athens is a fun little city. It...In Paul's time it was already an ancient city. It had been around for quite some time. It was an intellectual and cultural center of the entire empire of Rome. Our modern-day philosophy, our modern-day...even modern science, in the logic and the rules behind things, was founded in large part in Athens in Paul's time and before. It's a place that prided itself very much on being progressive and open-minded, and open to new ideas and thoughts, and concepts and world views, philosophies. It probably, if you look at the Roman Empire at that time, I would guess that it probably had the highest per capita of PhDs in the whole Roman Empire. If they had been giving out PhDs that that time, this would have been the place to be. It was a very intellectual, very learned place.

And the funny thing there...Paul ends up coming in; he's preaching and teaching, and he's spending time there. And before long these intellectuals, the philosophers, some of them start hearing Paul and they wanna know more about what he's saying, so they actually go ahead and invite him to come and to speak to them and to debate with them. And before long, here you actually have this man who not too long before had been beaten wrongfully and imprisoned, run out of another town; now he is appearing before and almost debating, kind of presenting a discussion at a conference sort of thing...that sort of feel of an academic level with all these intellectual elite who shape the thought processes of logic for the whole rest of the Western world at the time. And he's sitting here and he's invited to tell them the gospel, and explain to them how it works, how it is that God is supposed to be interacting with humans, and everything else. And he sits here, and some of these people actually start to believe, and to follow, and to see what in the world is going on and they want to find out more about it. Some of them scoff at him, but it's a very different reaction than being thrown in jail. I mean, here he's actually hanging out with the intellectual elite and telling them about God.

Of course, then he goes on to Corinth. Corinth is a prosperous town. It's very strategically located. It was a trade center, and it had a very sensual history. I think in some ways, you know the saying, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas?" That's the sort of mindset that people had about Corinth...except for the fact that it was sort of going through this renovation. It had been colonized by the Romans, and they were cleaning up the city and kind of trying to make it more into a trade and convention center sort of a place, you know, as opposed to gambling and everything else. So what ends up happening is they're making it more and more a trade center. And this was a very strategic place 'cause Corinth had a harbor on either side. And this little isthmus that circled there...unless you wanted to sail the several hundred miles all away around the southern part of the Peloponnese and through these treacherous, rocky, stormy waters, you would go to Corinth. And the land is only about three or four miles wide there. So you pay somebody, they go ahead and put your ship on rollers, and they roll you across on this little road, put your ship in the water on the other side...you just covered three or four miles instead of, you know, going all the way around. So Corinth, they were getting very prosperous, they had all kinds of trade coming through here.

And the interesting thing is Paul gets here and God ends up saying, 'Paul, slow down. Take a break.' And he ends up spending a year and a half here in relative peace and prosperity...protection. In fact it's such that, when people do get upset with Paul and they start trying to raise all kinds of a ruckus and get him in trouble, the civil authorities turn around and they end up beating up the...they end up having the people beat up who are accusing Paul. They say, 'Stop stirring up trouble. Leave him alone. Just let him be.' And the whole time, Paul is being able to preach and to share the gospel.

It's just an interesting thing...as I look at it, it's...he goes from there, and then the next five verses or so he wraps up his trip, which is another, oh, fifteen hundred miles or so from there to Ephesus and on in just five verses. The big key, in many ways, is what happens here. Paul leaves Antioch and he is driven by the Holy Spirit, and just prevented opportunities to share the gospel, for whatever reason the Spirit was not concerned about having him share the gospel at that time in Asia. He wanted him to get to Europe. It was time for him to get there. And so he ended up in Greece, Macedonia, Achaia for those opportunities the Holy Spirit would open.

As I look at it, something very interesting that, to me, is the simple fact that the Holy Spirit...His whole goal with Paul was to glorify Christ. That was His whole intent. The funny thing is that there's no telling how He was gonna do it. When Paul would go into a city he would go there and he wouldn't have any idea how God was going to work. I mean, it really could be something from...he's gonna be beaten up, thrown in jail; in his first journey he got stoned, he got beat with stones to the point where people literally thought he was dead because he was such a nasty, bloody pulp. Somehow he didn't die; he was nursed back to health and he kept on going. He could have that sort of reception, or he could have something that was completely the opposite, where he is actually being protected by the civil authorities. There's no telling the reaction that he would have, that people would have to him. I mean, in Philippi he gets beaten, wrongfully imprisoned; in Thessalonica he gets run out of town in just a few weeks; in Athens he gets invited to talk to the biggest names in the intellectualism of the day. Then in Corinth he actually gets to stay for a year and a half while being protected by the civil authorities.

The Holy Spirit works the same way in our lives. We may not be traveling all around the world, going to Macedonia and everything else, but there will be times where, if you are willing to follow Christ, if you are willing to be used by the Spirit to glorify Christ, that's what the Holy Spirit wants to do in your life...is use you, in your life, to glorify Christ. There will be times in life where, for whatever reason, you wanna share. You may wanna tell somebody about Jesus and for whatever reason, the Holy Spirit just closes the doors and it just doesn't work out. And you may question, "Why? What in the world?" And then you come to other points in your life where, all of a sudden, you have opportunities that you could not have planned. I don't know if those opportunities for some...sometimes, in a single life... It may be that an economic recession comes along and totally wipes out your entire financial stability, your retirement, any sort of security that you have to even have any confidence that you'll be able to provide for your family in times to come. And still yet, in that time, God goes ahead and He gives you strength to rejoice and to have confidence in the same way that Paul and Silas had confidence in God and were praising God in the middle of a prison where they were wrongfully imprisoned. And God works through your life in that hard time to impact the people around you.

It may be that it's totally opposite. There are other times in life where something...it's just...man, things fall in line—job is totally secure, you don't have to worry about that, everything is totally right; your family is in great condition; maybe even some sort of miraculous...like a terminal illness or something like that gets healed. I don't know...God does that sort of thing.

The thing is, if you are willing to let God work through you, and the Holy Spirit to work in your life, He's going to do it; and He's going to take it and He will take your life to glorify Christ. But I cannot tell you how He will choose to do it. I can't make any guarantees about the path that He will force you...or not force you, that He will have you and call you to walk through life. Paul could have turned back at any time and gone back home, but he kept going.

'Course, a lot of times...and we've been working through a rotation of our Holy Spirit application groups, recognizing and responding to the Holy Spirit...it seems like a lot of times for Christians what we end up asking is, it's the sort of thing of saying, 'Hey, I know, I wanna be...I wanna go wherever God wants me to; I wanna take advantage of whatever opportunities God wants me to have; I want to...I wanna glorify God. I wanna be used by God in His plan of whatever He's got goin' on. I just don't know how. What do I do? Where's my starting step? How do I do this? I don't even know how to recognize the Holy Spirit. Like, it's all fine and good for Paul to say 'Yeah, this was closed; I couldn't share the gospel, and God's calling me over here,' but I don't even know that. How in the world do I...How in the world do I get to that point?'

That's a question that we commonly come up against. And I'd just summarize it with the question of 'How do I get involved? How do I get to be a part of this, of what God's got goin' on in the world, in my life and in the lives of people around me?' And there's four things that I'd just basically run through right here.

First of all you have to be willing to follow. You *have* to be willing to follow. Paul didn't set out with this and say, 'Ok, I will only go ahead...You have to show me the whole way first, and I gotta know a, b, c, d, e, f, and g, exactly where all this is gonna take me.' That's not the way it works. You have to be willing to get out there and follow the Holy Spirit as He leads. It's similar to...we've used an analogy of if you're surfing or body boarding, that sort of thing, and you wanna go out and you wanna catch a wave. First of all, you don't look at the ocean and tell the ocean exactly where you want the wave placed, where you want it to build, where you want it to break, how you want it to come in to the beach, everything else. No, you go out there and you realize that the ocean is beyond your control. And if you wanna surf, if you wanna body board, you have to be willing to get out there and take whatever the ocean gives you. Same way with God. If you want to be involved in what God is doing in the world, you've got to get out there and be willing to take whatever God brings you, because that will be whatever is most effective to reach the world for Christ, to extend His grace to the world. So you have to be willing to.

Second thing is this: you need to be attentive. In surfing or body boarding, what you do is you go and you kinda...you may sit here and watch for a little bit, unless if it's a place where you know really, really well, you may sit here and watch for a little bit. You'll watch the sets of waves coming in, see the patterns of them, the small waves, the larger waves, how frequently they come in, what angle they're coming in, different things. You just...you study, you watch, and you learn; and you learn to pay attention to it and see how it moves.

In a similar way it's the same sort of thing with the spiritual world. You need to learn to be attentive to the Holy Spirit. Now in the spiritual disciplines...or typically how we do this...and I don't have time to go in and explain the whole spiritual disciplines and everything else, what I'll tell you is this. Spiritual disciplines are simply a practice. It's like an athlete lifting weights so that his body will be strengthened to respond in the game the way it's supposed to. In the same way, we can work out and exercise ourselves spiritually, mentally, emotionally, so that our souls, our spirits, will respond to God at the appropriate time as they're supposed to. Prayer, reading scripture, memorization, meditation, things like that, fasting...there's all kinds of different things.

If you have questions about the spiritual disciplines, two quick things that I would recommend for you. One is this—our Holy Spirit application groups. We're finishing up our second rotation. The third rotation will be starting after Easter. Get involved in that. We go ahead and help walk people through some of an introduction to different spiritual disciplines. The second thing is there is a really good book that I would recommend. There're all kinds of books out here, but the second one is "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life." "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life" by Donald Whitney, and it's just a very simple book. We have a couple of 'em out at the store. It's a simple book that helps give you an introduction and help you understand 'How can I discipline and train my spirit, my soul, to see and to respond to God when the time comes?' Third thing is this—learn to recognize the Spirit's voice. When you actually get out there, there is only so much...it's the same way when you're body boarding, surfing, that sort of thing as it is with, say, whitewater kayaking or rafting. You can only give so much instruction on the shore. Then there just comes a point when you gotta get out there and get in the water and feel how it moves. And you just have to learn when it's time to just go ahead and kick for all it's worth to catch that wave as it's starting to build and so that you can ride it in. In the same way, you actually have to learn to recognize the Spirit's voice.

There are four quick things that I would say, and these are just things that I have run into as I've been working with people in the Holy Spirit application groups, four quick things. Scripture—the Holy Spirit will never tell you something that contradicts scripture, never. God does not contradict Himself.

The second thing is believers. God gave us the church, other believers, so that we could walk this life and this journey together. He didn't give us a circle of believers just so that we could go ahead and turn our backs on 'em and walk our own way. It's because God knows our hearts are treacherous; we can be easily misled, so we are to surround ourselves with other godly people who will love us and tell us what we need to hear, even if it's not what we want to hear. And so what ends up happening is the Spirit works through other believers as well to confirm, 'Yeah, you're headed the right direction. Keep goin',' cheer us on. He also works through believers to say, 'Whoa, wait, hold up. You're headed the wrong direction. That's not right.'

Third thing is prayer; and prayer is something that is very much an individual sort of thing that the Holy Spirit can speak to us through. And circumstances...the circumstances in life...He will open doors and close doors, He will open opportunities, close opportunities to share the gospel in individual situations, maybe somebody that you really wanna talk to, doors just keep closing. Maybe that's God goin' ahead and sayin', 'Here you go, closing doors.' Here's the thing—prayer and circumstances, those can be very subjective. That's why God gave us scripture and believers, because those two things...if either of those two things are putting up a red flag you probably need to stop and look at it, because God will never contradict Himself and He gave us the church, other believers, the body of Christ, so that we can help hold each other accountable, cheer each other on, and help admonish one another to go the right way.

And finally, the last thing is simply this—when He speaks, respond. There will come a point in time where the Holy Spirit opens up an opportunity for you. Maybe it's sharing the gospel with somebody that you work with, or a friend, or family. I don't know. Maybe it's just tellin' 'em about Jesus. Maybe it's even just a time of where you were going to be going through a very hard time in life, like Paul in that prison, wrongfully imprisoned; but you do so in such a way that you experience God's grace and it becomes evident to those around you, and they are all of a sudden finding themselves hungry and thirsty for that grace that is overflowing inside of you. I don't know what that situation will be; but what ends up happening is there comes a point that you have to decide, when you feel that wave building, that you have to decide 'It's time; I'm gonna ride this wave wherever it goes.' It's the same way with the Holy Spirit. You have to decide, there comes that point where an opportunity is presented and you have to step through that door, wherever it takes you. If you're not willin' to, you won't surf. That's just the way it goes.

The cool thing about the Holy Spirit is, I guarantee Paul came to the end of his life and he wouldn't have changed a thing about it all. Wrongfully imprisoned and everything...I guarantee he came slidin' into home, getting' up, nothin' left, totally beaten up, bruised, battered, totally covered in dust; and he was like, 'Woo hoo hoo hoo! That was a wild ride! That was awesome!' Because that's the way that it'll work with the Holy Spirit. Not that it's always fun, not that it's always happy, but that when you look back on it you see all the ups and all the downs and everything else in a whole new light, an eternal light where you see how God was alive and active and working in your life. And that is the most amazing thing in all of existence...to see God Himself, the Creator of the universe, letting you be a part of what He is doing in the world. *That* is an awesome thing.

Please stand.

[Congregation sings the blessing song.]

Go in grace.