

Series: The Relentless Gospel – Acts 16
No Call To Comfort / July 20th, 2021 / Daniel Hickinbotham

- Let us read the word of the Lord together Acts 16:1-5
 - **16 Paul went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. 2 The brothers and sisters at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. 3 Paul wanted Timothy to go with him; so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.**
- **Would you pray with me:**
- On fire in the beginning... <Expound>
 - **To be honest, I still find myself longing for those days when it seemed like the solution was always simple and that my heart would forever burn with unquenchable passion for the Lord.**
- Over a decade later, having grown in maturity some, I realize that many of my statements were made in subtle self-aggrandizement and many more were made from a place of simple ignorance...
 - *I believed that life in Christ would be an experience of unrestricted exponential growth...*
 - If I followed the same formula that seemed to be working so well, it would mean I would soon have a personal life and ministry that were... *perfect*.
 - *But then... life happened...*
 - *And hardest of all... In my times of greatest need, it felt as though the heavens that had once smiled upon me had become cold.*
- I share this as a reminder to myself and to you, that we will always have a tendency to idealize certain seasons of our life and walk with the Lord... we will look back and think... ah if things could just be like THAT again... then I would be happy... then I would be holy...
 - *but that season is probably not quite like we envisioned it... probably not as perfect as we thought...*
 - **And we have tendency to do the same thing with the Bible.**
 - We look back to Acts chapter 2 and think... if only... if only we as a church could be like THAT...
 - *But the entire book of Acts, and especially chapters 12 and on, remind us of our first point (if you are taking notes):*

- **Church life... Christian life... is very messy.**
- Verse 1 begins... “Paul went on to Derbe and Lystra...”
 - *Paul went on... from where, with who?*
 - Pastor Patrick, I am sure did a great job last week in covering the story of Paul and Barnabas parting ways...
 - **But can you imagine the heart break and discouragement of that... Paul and Barnabas had been set apart by the Holy Spirit of God and commissioned by the church.**
 - They evangelized, planted churches, performed miracles, and endured persecution together...
 - And they had now broken this *divinely appointed fellowship* over a disagreement about support staff.
 - Can you imagine how frustrating and confounding that must have been to Paul and Barnabas, much less those who had been converted and disciplined by them?
 - *What did the church in Antioch, who had commissioned them, think?*
 - Paul and Barnabas did what? But we fasted and prayed! We laid hands on them! Did we really hear from the Holy Spirit about them? Did we miss something?
- And now Paul is entering this region of Derbe and Lystra where it says “there was disciple named Timothy, ... The brothers and sisters at Lystra spoke highly of him.” And the beginning of verse 3 says, “Paul wanted Timothy to go with him...”
 - *So Paul... on the heels of his relational FAILURE with Barnabas... now wants to reach into the pot of this faith community and take with him a young man who is clearly a blessing to this whole body of believers around Lystra.*
 - This surfaces a question... a question that is not clearly answered in the text... is Paul’s ministry, as Apostle to the Gentiles, that much more important than the ministry that Timothy has to the church in this tri-city area of Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium?

IT IS EASY TO LOOK BACK AND MAKE JUDGMENTS ABOUT IT... But...
- Imagine... <MegaChurch Mike Example>
 - Does the reach of MegaChurch Mikes ministry trump the ministry Jeff is doing here?
 - Both are faithful men, pursuing God’s calling on their lives...
 - Both are concerned with Gospel going forth in South East Idaho...
 - Both LOVE the church... including the congregation at CCC...
 - **What is the right thing to do? Its messy...**
 - *What if MegaChurch Mike had just had a split from his primary ministry partner? Would that change the algorithm?*
- All of that consternation that would be caused by such a situation here, is likely what was happening amongst them.
 - *“Wait, Paul want to take Timothy with him? Why, because he ran off Barnabas and John Mark? What’s he going to do to Timothy?”*

- *“Wait, Paul needs someone to go with him? Why doesn’t he want to take me? Or why doesn’t he want to take my son?”*
- *“Wait, doesn’t Paul have the backing of the church in Antioch AND Jerusalem? Why does he need to take our best resources?”*
- As much as we idealize the life of the church from the Book of Acts, we cannot forget that those thousands who were being added to their numbers, were sinful, broken, idolatrous, and loaded down with their own cultural and personal baggage from a life of living outside the grace of God.
 - *It makes things messy....*
 - *And though we rejoice that Christ Jesus, by His perfect life and His atoning work on the cross, has justified sinners, justified us, before God, and ensured that one day we will be glorified and entirely free of sin and it’s messy temporal consequences....*
 - **We must remain aware that our sanctification is messy... that the church is a gathering of saints whose conformity to the image of Christ is still in processes...**
 - In the same way the spread of the Kingdom across the earth, is messy... because it’s going forth through people still in the process of sanctification.
- That messiness is compounded by another fact:
 - *A life lived in service to a King, who the rulers and kingdoms of this earth rage against, is a guaranteed life of struggle... of mess... of continuing to gather our bearing and reform our ranks in the midst of the fog of war.*
 - A life lived as a living sacrifice to the Lord will require that we regularly see things we love, even good things, consumed in the fire of the altar. Its confusing... and messy..
- *Timothy was a gift from God to his mother and to the saints in that area, and that gift was taken... and redistributed across the region...*
 - And it’s not explicitly clear that it was for any other reason than Paul “wanted Timothy to go with him.”
 - *So, I am certain it was hard for the community around Lystra to lose Timothy.*
 - ***And I KNOW it was hard for Timothy.***
 - Which leads us to our second point.

- **Comfort is not our calling.**
 - Despite what everything in our culture is trying to convince us of... comfort is not our calling...
- This is demonstrated in 3 ways in the passage...
 - *Circumcision*
 - *Confrontation*
 - *Captivity*
- **First: CIRCUMCISION**
 - *Read with me the second half of verse 3: "...so [Paul] took [Timothy] and circumcised him, because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was Greek."*
 - Now there is some irony here:
 - *In Chapter 15, it is shown that Paul has come to this region from the Council in Jerusalem where it was decided that NO, in fact, you DO NOT HAVE TO OBSERVE THE ORDINANCES OF THE IN ORDER to be a member of the family of God.*
 - **You NEED NOT BE circumcised to be a worker in the Kingdom.**
- This is Paul, who speaks so aggressively against circumcision in a later letter to this region, that his language would be borderline inappropriate to use in polite company.
 - *Paul is carrying a message with him that plainly indicates it is Timothy's right to decline circumcision.*
 - So why... why would Paul subject Timothy to this?
 - *Furthermore, why would Timothy subject himself to this?*
 - It is clear from the story in Genesis 34, that adult circumcision was both a painful process and a debilitating recovery.
 - **It's unlikely that Timothy just wanted to see what it was like.**
- The first letter to the Corinthians gives us a controlling interpretation of why Paul would press for this and why Timothy would submit to this:
 - In Chapter 9 verse 20-22 he says:

20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law— though I myself am not under the law[a]—to win those under the law. 21 To those who are without the law, like one without the law—though I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ—to win those without the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some.
 - *In this instance, it wasn't the Greeks who were struggling with concept of liberty from the law.*
 - Genuine worship for the Greeks had included all types of spiritual and physical immorality and indulgence.
 - *They could not care less what you did with your body as long as you were getting in on the craziness needed to please the gods.*

- **But for the Jews, genuine worship had involved strict Torah observance, including the distinct physical sign of circumcision.**
 - *They cared tremendously about the specific ways in which Yahweh desired to be worshipped.*
- Where the Jerusalem council had ordered restriction for the Greeks (to abstain from participating in their old forms of worship) it had ordered liberty for the Jews and the Greeks, to find salvation, not in Torah observance, but through faith in the finished work of Jesus.
 - It is the attitude of the heart, towards God first and towards the weaker brother as a consequence, that matters... So Timothy's circumcision is not a glaring contradiction in the text...
 - ***It is not him trying to keep the Law of Moses***
 - *Rather it is his willingness to come to harm in order to keep the law of Christ, which is the law of Love.*
 - In this instance, those who the texts call "the Jews who were in those places" were the weaker brother. So, Timothy embraced the discomfort of circumcision for no other reason than to remove a stumbling block for them.
 - ***"I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some."***
 - *In a fascinating contrast, Verse 4 then says: "As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe."*
 - Timothy underwent circumcision so that he might gain access to the circumcised and deliver to them the good news that their hope was no longer wrapped up in their ability to observe the law that proscribed their circumcision.
- Now, it is easy get focused on the physical sacrifice of circumcision.
 - *But that isn't all Timothy sacrificed in order to reach the lost.*
 - He sacrificed the comfort of being a well-respected member of a community.
 - He sacrificed the comfort and familiarity of his home and family.
 - He sacrificed the comfort of his vocation and business opportunities.
 - He sacrificed the comfort of not having to face persecution and imprisonment.
 - And the community had to sacrifice the presence and ministry of Timothy.
 - **All so that others might know the love of God in Christ.**
- **2nd way this passage demonstrates comfort is not our calling: CONFRONTATION**
- Verses 6-15 of this passage recounts a story of God FORBIDDING Paul from going into Asia... (WHATEVER THAT MEANS)... leading them to Macedonia through a vision. Upon arriving in Philippi, they connect with a God-fearing Gentile woman named Lydia. She is generally regarded as the first documented European convert to Christianity. And she invites them to stay with her, using her home as a base of operations for their evangelism of the city.
 - *So, they have been out evangelizing, and one day they are on their way to corporate prayer (get this... Paul the Apostle regularly attended corporate prayer...), so they are on their way to prayer and this demon possessed slave girl begins to follow them... for days she follows them, shouting out "These men,*

who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the servant of the Most High God!"

- Frequently this passage is translated that Paul got annoyed, but it can be translated as grieved...
 - *So whether Paul was heartbroken for this demonically afflicted little girl, who was being exploited by her masters for financial gain, or he was just donzo with ruckus she was causing... he turns and says:*
 - ***"I command you... in the name of Jesus Christ... to come out of her."***
 - **And it came out right away.**
- We as believers praise God THAT DEMONS TREMBLE AT THE NAME OF JESUS and that in His name people can be freed from demonic oppression and torment.
 - *We see it for what it is... the Kingdom of God destroying the kingdom of darkness...*
 - **We would expect that others would be with us in this... but this is not case here...**
 - Look what happens to them in verses 19-24:
 - *When her owners realized that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 Bringing them before the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are seriously disturbing our city. They are Jews 21 and are promoting customs that are not legal for us as Romans to adopt or practice." 22 The crowd joined in the attack against them, and the chief magistrates stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After they had severely flogged them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to guard them carefully. 24 Receiving such an order, he put them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks.*
- So, rather than rejoice that there is a living God and turning their hearts in faith to Him
 - *They are enraged that they have lost their ability to exploit their slave for financial gain...*
 - **To build their wealth off the spiritual bondage of another human being.**
 - They drag Paul and Silas into the public square to seek retribution for what the Kingdom of God, what the power of God, has done to their demonic status quo.
- This is what confrontation with the kingdoms of the world will look like.
 - *Proclaim and live out the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit long enough, and you will confront the spiritual strongholds of the culture.*
 - And they will come after you to destroy you, claiming that they are doing what is best to protect the empire.
 - And what happens? They get the redress they are looking for... they beat Paul and Silas and throw them into prison.
 - Which is the third way in which this passage shows us we are not called to a comfort.
- **Third: CAPTIVITY**

- This needs little explanation. For those of us who have been to jail or prison, we can testify that it is an awful dehumanizing place. In many ways jails and prisons are the emblem of all that is wrong with humanity. It was much worse then.
- *Paul and Silas were thrown in there for nothing more than demonstrating and proclaiming truth that confronted the prevailing culture.*
 - PAUL WAS A ROMAN CITIZEN EVEN... THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN TO ROMAN CITIZENS
 - **But it happened to them...**
 - *And it is currently happening to Christians in close to 50 countries around the world.*
 - Brothers and sisters: Why should we expect anything different? Because we live in a particular time in which religious toleration happens to be on the agenda of some governments? Because we live in a country in which the founders enshrined religious freedom as a right in the constitution?
 - ALTHOUGH WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THAT, NEITHER OF THOSE REASONS ARE BIBLICAL REASONS NOT TO EXPECT VIOLENT OPPOSITION TO AND IMPRISONMENT FOR THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL.
 - Any time you march into the public arena with a message as exclusive as ours that there is One God and One King and One Kingdom...
 - Anytime you publicly wrestle with the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil and darkness...
 - *YOU SHOULD EXPECT CONFLICT... OPPOSITION... SILENCING... IMPRISONMENT... DEATH.*
 - Or...
 - **You should expect conversions.**

- **God uses the Mess and Discomfort to Expand the Kingdom (REPEAT)**
- After Paul and Silas are imprisoned they are having themselves a little worship service in the stocks. Suddenly, there is an earthquake that causes the chains of all the prisoners to come loose and the doors of the prison to open. The jailer wakes and sees this and gets ready to kill himself because of either the shame or the coming consequences of losing all the prisoners. But Paul calls out to him and comforts him... *“Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”*
 - The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He escorted them out and said, **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** 31 They said, **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”** 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. 33 He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. 34 He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.
- *Think about this: The next day Paul and Silas were released because of their citizenship. Which means God allowed them to be demonically annoyed... publicly maligned... physically beaten... and unlawfully imprisoned.... **So that this jailer...** this instrument of the kingdoms of this world that was unjustly incarcerating two emissaries of the King of Kings... and his family... might come to know the Love and Lordship of Christ.*
- Brother and sisters we live in a culture that reinforces to us our rights, especially our right to comfort.
 - Credit Card companies make their billions by selling to the American people, not a particular product, rather the concept that you have the right to the same comfortable life you see others living in their commercials. All for just 18% interest with cashback on all of your purchases.
 - ***This culture is fighting a war for our souls... it wants us to be given over to the obsession for self-preservation and self-indulgence.***
- Friends, we follow a Savior who did the opposite...
 - *Christ stepped down out of the perfect order and comfort of heaven into the sorrow and mess of humanity.*
 - We follow a Messiah that laid down his right to be served by all the host of heaven and all of the nations of the earth, **to serve**, even washing the feet of followers who would ultimately abandon and deny him.
 - **We pledge allegiance to a King whose coronation occurred through the most egregious mess of human justice: the crucifixion of the only innocent man to have ever walked the face of the earth...**
- And his invitation to us is to take up our cross and follow Him... so that others, **up to and including our OPPRESSORS AND ENEMIES**, might know the love of God in Christ.

- *And though frightening on its face, as the cross only looks like terror to the one picking it up... we may be surprised by the outcome:*
- Above any other rights we may lay down, above the right to liberty, to the pursuit of happiness and self-determination, ***even the right to life itself***, in Christ we have been given a right which can never be laid down or revoked...
 - ***the right to be called children of God. With that right comes glory far exceeding any earthly benefits or comforts.***
- And all though comfort is not our calling, we will find that the God of all comfort is with us in our sacrifice... and will use our sacrifice to comfort others...
 - **In the midst of the messy Christian life, we will discover that our God, the God of order, will bring forth his Kingdom from the chaos that we perceive, just as he brought light from darkness and life from death.**
- Look at what it says in verse 5: ***“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”***
- *The Kingdom of God expanded, despite being opposed by the religious elites in Jerusalem... (recap the drama of Acts)*
 - despite all of it “...the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers...” the Kingdom of God expanded...
 - *That is how powerful the Gospel of Christ is... it takes mess and creates beauty... it takes death and creates life... it takes imprisonment and brings freedom... it takes the reign of darkness and makes it the Kingdom of God.*
 - **Do you believe this?**