

Acts 16:11-15

MP: We are called to be on mission wherever we are
FCF: We don't engage in mission because we believe it depends on us
CC: Salvation is accomplished by God, not our efforts

TRANSITION: Welcome + series on Mission, today's passage is Acts 16 and it's on page 925 + Pray

INTRO

- I. One of my favorite questions to ask people when I begin getting to know them is, “where do you live?” It’s less that I’m curious about the answer, and more interested in *how* they answer. Imagine someone asked you or me that question, “where do you live?”**
- A. While on a trip to visit family in North Carolina, you’d say “just outside DC”
 - B. If someone chats you up strolling through the small towns surrounding Roanoke, you’d say “Northern Virginia” (which, more than likely did not score you any points)
 - C. If you’re just meeting someone after church here, you’d say “Falls Church, kind of between 29 and 50”
 - 1. Now, finally, we’re getting a little bit more specific. We’ve pinched to zoom on google maps, and we’ve got a city, and a portion of the city.
 - 2. Maybe you throw out a restaurant or a park that’s nearby but only after mentioning how long it’d take to drive there both with and without traffic
 - D. Now finally suppose, you’re taking your dog on a walk through your neighborhood, and another friendly, but perhaps overly enthusiastic dog owner says “can they say hello?” (which by the way, you should only say with your dog, not your kids, or it’s sort of culty), and then you both start chatting and they ask you “where do you live?”
 - 1. And you say, “over there, at the bottom of the hill” - which in some ways is pretty vague. But when I say it to my neighbor, it has all the meaning that it needs. We are literally in the neighborhood. There’s no need to say, “just outside DC”, or Northern Virginia, or Falls Church.
- II. Part of living in a spread out, highly populated portion of our country is that we tend to think that the most defining aspect of “where we live” is that area - Outside DC, Northern Virginia, Falls Church, Arlington, or the country folk of Fairfax. And in some ways, there’s no issue with this, except that it affects how we view the mission of our local church. We tend to think too broadly.**
- A. If you were having a conversation with someone about our church, and they asked you, “how does the Falls Church Anglican spread the gospel through mission?”
 - 1. You might say, we support missionaries and organizations overseas. And you’d be right.
 - 2. Or you might say we give toward missionaries here in the US, and we’re part of the Anglican Church in North America, and our diocese which spans part of the East Coast, and we support church planting. And you’d be right.
 - 3. Or maybe you’d say, the Falls Church Anglican is here, just outside DC - we are reaching Northern Virginia with the gospel.

III. Now, I'm all for big goals - my motto used to be "go big or go home", until I had kids and got old, so now it's just go home.

- A. Northern Virginia is massive! When I googled it, which is a pretty accurate way to learn things, the internet told me that Northern Virginia's population is around 3.2 million people.
- B. If the answer to "where is mission happening through your local church" is all of northern Virginia, if you're anything like me, you'd feel discouraged. You'd feel like that's a massive undertaking!
- C. I'd feel like it'd be hard to see my impact in that, and jump in with that mission, I'm just one person after all. I'd certainly be tempted to give up if it were my job to try and reach Northern Virginia for Christ.

IV. But what if the real answer to "where do you live?" Is also the answer to where mission should be happening?

- A. Greenway Downs. Shrevewood. Sleepy Hollow. Graham Road. The cul de sac where your townhouse is. Your floor in the apartment complex. The 5 other roommates in your tiny Clarendon condo.
- B. You see, the most strategic place for mission, is exactly where God put you - in your neighborhood. On your street. In your cul de sac. In your apartment building.
- C. And guess what, it doesn't have to be all that complicated. It doesn't have to be a massive area with millions of people, nor does it require a clever strategy and a unique spin on a message.
- D. Here's the best news: when we truly embrace that God has placed each of us where we are, to join His mission to spread the gospel, and to trust Him with the fruit, it can set in motion a movement of transformation that we could never have imagined.

~ TRANSITION: This morning, through the story of Lydia, we'll first see the **strategy** for mission, then the **content** of mission, and then the **response** to mission. Let's start by looking at the strategy of mission.~

STRATEGY — (v9 + v11-13)

I. Now jumping into the middle of the book of Acts, can be a little bit disorienting — it's like starting the Lord of the Rings, but during the second movie. Who are all of these people, where are they going, and what's the deal with the pointy ears and the hairy short dudes.

- A. Now at the beginning of Acts 16, Paul and Silas leave from Syria and head into Galatia (modern day Turkey). While they're there, they meet Timothy and he joins up.
- B. This band of three then spend time moving throughout the region ministering as the Lord directs them. Right around this time you'll notice the tense in Acts 16 changes from a "they" to a "we" - which more than likely means that Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, joins the missionary group
- C. While they're in a city called Troas, Paul has a vision in the night - **let's read v9-10**
- D. So, Paul has this vision of the Macedonian man, and the group of now 4 missionaries recognizes that this is God sending them to Macedonia (which was in northeastern Greece).

II. Now don't miss this, in v10 it says that they concluded "*that God had called us to preach the gospel to*" the people of Macedonia.

- A. This is really the first part of the missionary strategy in this chapter. The Lord sends.
 - 1. They had been traveling around already, as God directed, ministering. But the Lord had plans that now they must head into Macedonia.
 - 2. He had something for them to do, to preach the gospel, in this particular place, which is why He sent them.
- B. God's mission, always begins with God initiating it. Which means that the sending in and of itself, is an indicator of where to do mission.
- C. Throughout Acts and in other places in the New Testament, we learn that Christians are sent to places by the Holy Spirit, or prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to certain places. The reason being, God sends us where he wants us for His mission.
 - 1. So wherever Paul was or was going, there was where the Lord had a mission for him. He need not wait to preach the gospel, but rather trust that the Lord would open the doors as He sent him

III. So Paul and the other three (Silas, Timothy and Luke) obediently respond to God's sending and make the long journey all the way to Philippi.

- A. Now Philippi was a big city, and was a Roman colony with a privileged status — so it was a fairly affluent, trade city with a wide range of types of people that called it home.
- B. But, there evidently wasn't a large population of Jews in Philippi, or else there would have been a synagogue. Which in many other places, was where Paul would start his missionary work.
- C. So in v13 we get some insight into what they do instead - **read v13**

IV. So the missionaries are sent by God to Philippi, and then go to where the people were, to the place of prayer.

- A. Now what's probably meant by this "place of prayer" is that it was a group of women who worshiped the same God as the Jews, but who hadn't fully converted to Judaism. This is what it's meant by referring to Lydia as "a worshiper of God". They were gentiles, who were seeking God, but didn't know the only true Way to Him. This would have been the group of people who would have been the most primed to embrace the gospel
- B. The first thing for us to notice is that the direction of mission always flows from God to people. Paul and the missionaries went to *people* to share the good news with them.
- C. It may sound obvious, but it could be easy to miss within our heavily programmatic culture, this community of missionaries did not just go to an *event*, *they went to where people were*.
 - 1. They knew that God had called them to individual people. They attended the prayer gathering, because that's where people were, whom they could engage with the good news of the gospel.
- D. God's heart is for people who do not know Him, and He sends His people on mission to bring His gospel to them. God sends us to where people are.

V. This is still how God works. Friends, the Lord has sent you, has sent me, exactly where we are for His mission - to see lost people found. To see people who do not know Christ, trust in Christ. That is the core of mission, so you do not need to fly overseas or attend an evangelistic rally in order to be a missionary.

- A. It is no mistake that you live in the neighborhood that you live in. It is no mistake that you are moving into the place you're about to. God has sent you there - if even for a short time, though most of us for years. What if we all chose to fully embrace that as God's calling, part of his missionary strategy, to preach the gospel there?
 - 1. That's what international missionaries do as well - they go to where God is sending them, to live amongst the people God has called them to, so that they can bring the gospel. Friends, you've just already been sent!
- B. What if we realized that God has sent us, as missionaries, alongside other Christians, to be heralds of Good News to the people we live alongside?
- C. What if your neighborhood wasn't just the place your house was in. But was your mission-field?

VI. Years ago, during the first year of our little church we helped plant, we talked often about the idea of viewing your neighborhood, or the place where you live, as the primary place God has called you to be on mission.

- A. One leader in particular caught onto this idea of making their house a hub for community - so he decided, rather than doing a cookout in the backyard behind a fence where no one could see community happening, he'd host it in his driveway. Him and his wife could make a bunch of hot dogs and pull out the yard games, and then they could invite every single one of the neighbors on their street.
- B. But here's the brilliant part - he knew he was part of a missionary community (just like Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy) - he didn't need to do this alone. It just so happened that our small group met at his house every Thursday, and a few of us lived in the neighborhood. So he decided, why not host this shindig on a Thursday! He called it Third Thursday Throwdown. Which I love, because who doesn't appreciate a good naming of something to make it more special - like you're Adam in the garden.
- C. So once a month, for probably 6 months, a ton of neighbors, and a bunch of Christians from our church connected together and built relationships over hot dogs and potluck food.
- D. This leader, and actually several more (the idea caught on), realized that God had *sent* them on mission in their neighborhoods, to the people across the street. It changed how they viewed their neighborhood. Slowly, what was once anonymity became friendship, what was once gossip became prayer, what was once fear became missional courage.

~ Transition: Church, God has sent each one of us to exactly where we are, to be missionaries, to the people around us. That is the strategy of mission, it's as simple as that. Go, to people. But here's the thing, lots of people go to a community and build relationship. What's different when the church does it? The Content.

CONTENT — (v13-14)

- I. So the missionaries are at this place of prayer, and v13 tells us that they “sat down and spoke to the women who had come together — let me reread v14**
 - A. So the missionaries go to where the people are, they sit down with them and engage them in conversation with the truth of the gospel.
 - B. Now we get a lot of clues for a central theme in the book of Acts with phrases like “we spoke”, “one who heard us” and “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul”

- C. Lydia is engaged with conversation, she hears and pays attention to what was said. Do you know why? It's because gospel, means Good News. It must be spoken. It must be shared, it cannot simply be observed or noticed or felt.
- D. Now I'm not saying that good deeds, or building relationships, or anything like that isn't worthwhile (of course not, see point #1 of this sermon). Those things should naturally flow out of us as Christians because of our own transformation by the gospel, and they also often gain you a hearing with those who are opposed to the message of the Gospel.
- E. However, they are not the core of what mission is — God has called us to “go therefore, and make disciples of every nation” that is His mission that we are joining Him in. You cannot help someone follow Jesus if they never hear about Jesus.

II. Paul and the other missionaries were clear that this group of women needed to *hear* the Good News, that Jesus the God-Man, had come to make a way back to God, even for the Gentiles.

- A. They needed to hear that this God they were seeking really had created them and everything around them, and was supremely holy and good. And that our rebellion against this God, our sin, had caused a irreversible fracture in our relationship with Him, introduced a cosmic level of brokenness, evil and pain into the world, and worst of all, demanded a punishment. Death. Physical yes, but eternal. Man would spend eternity apart from God in hell.
- B. They needed to hear that their own sin, their own unholiness, was part of this as well. And that there was nothing that they could do in their own power - no amount of good would outweigh this bad, no amount of attending this place of prayer would be enough.
- C. But the gospel is good news.
 - 1. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
 - 2. “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”
- D. God sent His son, to live the obedient life we did not live, and to then die the death that we deserved for our sin. He was buried in a grave, but then rose to life demonstrating that “death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory? O Death where is your sting?” - “but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”.
 - 1. This group of women gathered in Philippi needed to hear, as do we, that now simply by faith in Jesus Christ, we can be saved. That his punishment was enough, that Jesus lived in perfect obedience on your behalf, that Jesus repaired the fracture between us and God, and that we will spend an eternity with Him!

III. Now you can imagine this scene, where these absolute rock star missionaries are sharing the gospel with this group of women. And there's this dynamic presentation of the gospel that tugs at all of the right heart strings, tells just enough jokes but not too much, with pristine theology spoken in a contextually relevant way.

- A. But that's not what the text says, does it? No, it doesn't say that by “Paul's persuasiveness they were all convinced and believed”
- B. In fact, it doesn't even say a handful of the women believed.
- C. No, v14 says “The Lord opened [Lydia's] heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul”.

IV. Now instead of getting discouraged by hearing that, let us realize the massive load that has actually been lifted off of all of our shoulders.

- A. You see, Paul and those missionaries were sent by God to Philippi, they went to where people were, they shared the Good News of the gospel, and God opened one woman's heart to believe.
- B. First of all, think of how much that says of God's love for Lydia. That he would move 4 guys hundreds of miles so that she would hear and believe.
 - 1. If that is not Jesus leaving the 99 sheep for the 1 lost one, I don't know what is.
 - 2. Maybe that's actually you this morning. Maybe the Lord wants you to know, that like Lydia, He loves you and is moving mountains so that you would hear His Good News and trust Him.
- C. The second encouragement in v14 is the joy of knowing that is it not up to us, to save our neighbors.
 - 1. The Lord opens hearts to believe, not the persuasiveness of your words
 - 2. The Lord opens hearts to believe, not whether or not you can share the entire gospel message in one conversation by the mailbox.
 - 3. The Lord opens hearts to believe, not your clever relational connecting so that just the right combination of people meet your neighbor
 - 4. Our part is to just be faithful in showing up, and sharing about Jesus.

V. Remember Third Thursday Throwdown? Well one of the connections a bunch of us made was with a neighbor right across the street, who would frequently come. Great guy who had a crazy story that was facing some difficult things, but he became friends with a few of us who lived nearby.

- A. Well one Thursday evening, when we were in the middle of small group at this house, we had split up guys and girls, and he came by. He ended up jumping in with us guys.
- B. So he just joined our little bible study moment, and we picked back up with where we were.
- C. After a few minutes, a question had been posed to the group of guys, and it was like awkward christian circle silence. Well he speaks up, and just goes, "can you tell me, like, what is the reason for the hope that you guys have?" — which is practically a direct quote from 1 Peter 3 where it says "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you,"
- D. So we got an opportunity to then just have a discussion about the truth of the gospel, the hope that we had in Jesus. Each of those guys, like me, probably still tell that story because it made such an impact on each of us.
- E. It was the Lord's work to bring him there and prepare him to hear, but our part was to just be faithful in showing up, and sharing about Jesus.

VI. Oftentimes the reasons that we struggle to be on mission in our community are because we either 1) don't know where to start or 2) don't feel like we have anyone else doing it with us.

- A. So just as a simple call to action, I want to invite you to a conversation we're hosting next Sunday the 26th from 5-7p downstairs in the lower narthex. It will be a low-key panel discussion of members from our church on how they have tried to practice hospitality and evangelism in their local contexts.
- B. So if you're looking to get some good ideas, feel some encouragement alongside other brothers and sisters on mission and are able to come, register on the website for that and come out. I'll see you there.

~ Transition: The strategy of mission is that God sends us to wherever we are to be missionaries. The content of mission is the Good News of the gospel which God enables people to hear. Now let's talk about the response of mission. What happens as a result of this missionary moment ~

RESPONSE — (v15 + v16-40)

I. **Let me read v14-15 again for us — The first thing that happens is that Lydia believes the gospel**

- A. See in v14, the Lord opened her heart to hear and then in v15 it says “and after she was baptized, and her household as well”
- B. It's sort of like this moment in Acts 8, when Philip is sent by God to this Ethiopian official who just so happens to be reading Isaiah 53, which is a prophecy all about Jesus being crucified for our sin, and the Ethiopian asks Philip “who is this about?” - it's literally God handing Philip a gospel opportunity on a silver platter; man, if evangelism was always that Tee'd up we'd all be battin 300s
- C. The Ethiopian official believes in Jesus, and his response while they're driving along the road and basically see a creek is “hey, here's some water, what prevents me from being baptized?”
- D. It's sort of the same feel with Lydia - she believes in Jesus, and the natural response is to get baptized. To proclaim her faith in Christ publicly.

II. **She also, being the wealthy and savvy seller of purple goods, uses her likely big home and practices hospitality - she invites everyone over to stay with her**

- A. Now it's actually kind of Paul's norm in other places, to not be a burden to anyone - it's part of his missionary strategy, which I think is why it says in v15 that Lydia “prevailed upon us”.
- B. It could be, that she had a sweet pool and was gonna cook steak, but maybe that's just what would work for me.
- C. Either way, what ends up happening to Lydia is that she is welcomed in Christ, and so she then welcomes others. It's a natural outflow of her embrace of Jesus - the Lord now has a mission for her.

III. **So in response to these missionaries being sent by God to Philippi, going to people, and sharing the Good News of the Gospel, Lydia gives her life to Christ, is baptized and immediately joins the mission and starts practicing hospitality. But guess what, the God who did all of that, is not yet done.**

- A. See after this moment with Lydia, the group continues to preach the gospel in Philippi. But as they are moving throughout the city, they are followed by a girl who is possessed by a demon that empowers her to tell people's fortunes. She's also enslaved by some people who create a for-profit business out of her. Talk about some spiritual warfare.
- B. She's following the missionaries around basically yelling and outing them as Christians within this Roman city. To make a crazy story short, Paul commands the spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her, and she likely gets converted to Christ (which happens every other time a demon is cast out in Scripture), and it ticks off her owners who were making bank off the demon inside her.

- C. This sets off the city, who think that the missionary group are destroying the customs of the city, and through a miscarriage of justice Paul and Silas get beaten and thrown into prison.
- D. Well, while they're wrongfully incarcerated, stuck in a dungeon with a bunch of other supposed criminals, they do what Christians often do in the face of difficulty. They pray and sing hymns to the Lord. Who in the middle of the night causes an earthquake which just so happens to open all of the prison doors.
- E. The Philippian jailer, who wakes up and thinks he's toast because everybody must've fled, realizes that Paul and his choir of criminals are all still there.
- F. The jailer, trembling with fear falls down before Paul and Silas, and in v30 says "sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house."
- G. After him and his whole family get baptized, he practices hospitality and washes their wounds and invites them over for dinner, and it says that "he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God".

IV. Paul and Silas get let out of prison, and you know what it says in v40? "So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed."

- A. Lydia's practically hosting a little church in her home at this point. And I think we know who at least three of the members are - Lydia, a wealthy woman, a formerly demon-possessed slave girl, and a gentile jailer - probably among others.
- B. Trust me, that's not the typical core team a church planter would choose, but isn't it evidence of God's work? Because only by God's grace would that sort of community come together. Only through the gospel of Jesus, which knows no human boundaries we put up economically, culturally or ethnically, only through the gospel of Jesus could that happen.
- C. There's this old Jewish prayer in the Talmud, that certainly had no connection to God's word, that would often be said by a Jewish head of household. "Lord thank you that I am not a woman, a slave or a gentile." But that is exactly who the Lord brought to himself in this fledgling little church in Philippi.

V. I mean, just think about it:

- A. God sent Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke to Macedonia, to Philippi. They embraced God's calling to be missionaries where the Lord had them.
- B. They went to where people were, to share the good news of the gospel.
- C. God opened one lady's heart to be able to hear that news, and it set in motion an entire church. So much so, that 12 years later Paul could write in Philippians 1:6 "...I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."
- D. If it hadn't been for Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke's willingness to be on mission with the Lord in Philippi, then what about the people Paul expressly thanks in Philippians chapter 4? Would we have heard about Epaphroditus, Euodia, Syntyche, Clement and all of the other saints?
- E. Friends, we are missionaries. And your mission field, is exactly where God has you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you feel like God has sent you right now? Is it your neighborhood? Is it a particular friend? Is it your barber, your gym, your apartment building?
2. What is it about our context in Northern Virginia that makes it difficult to build relationships with neighbors or people we cross paths with regularly? What is it about your own life that makes it difficult?
3. How have you been able to practice hospitality and evangelism where you are? What challenges have you run into?
4. Many would say that they are spiritual, but not religious in America. In general, atheism is shrinking and some form of agnosticism or other spirituality is on the rise. How could this present an opportunity for the gospel?
5. What are some ways your small group can encourage a culture of being on mission together?