

Acts 16:11-40

The gospel goes wherever you are.

We want to be well-equipped, prepared, have the tools we need to complete a job or that are appropriate for the environment. You don't want to forget the bug repellent while camping in the swamp. You don't want to only have a Phillips head screwdriver when all the outlet cover screws are flat-heads. You don't want to bring a knife to a gun fight... or so the saying goes.

We want to have what we need, at all times. The desire is so ingrained in us that the best of marketers use it to give us confidence in a brand. Visa - "Everywhere you want to be!" Meaning you can use Visa-branded cards everywhere, you can be a consumer everywhere you want to be.

We tend then to approach our faith the same way... we want tools, the right tools wherever it is we want to be. We maybe even fantasize about the perfect environment for my faith to flourish...

But what about "where I don't want to be?" Because life usually plays out in such a way that the perfect setting, the greener grass is elsewhere. But what if we had what we actually needed, everywhere we were? To feel prepared for the heights and the depths. The ease and the struggle. Both for us and for others.

This is what we recognize in this narrative from Acts today. They had what they needed, both the apostolic church planters and those that heard their message. The gospel carried and called everyone in the story. It is the gospel that equips us, that is our sustenance, repellent, our rocket launcher in the metaphorical gun fights of life.

We have before us proof that the gospel goes everywhere.

Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke and their team of gospel preachers have made their way to Europe after Paul had a vision and the Spirit confirmed they were to bring the message of Jesus to new lands. So they do what they always do, they proclaim Jesus as they live this missionary movement.

We encounter two characters - two different situations that give us hope for everything beyond and in between. Its appropriate as we start a new chapter in our story here in this new place.

The gospel goes everywhere you are; The gospel demands a response.

1) The Gospel goes wherever you are

As we launch into it this morning, I should probably define “gospel.” This is the truth of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each of those traveling on this missionary journey have come to believe in Jesus, to experience his grace and the filling of the Holy Spirit. So they go on talking about Jesus.

Luke 24:46–47 “and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that **repentance for the forgiveness** of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations...” (ESV)

That is what is being preached, forgiveness of sin in Christ and Christ alone, that he lived obediently in your place, died as your substitute and defeated death once for all. Eternal life as a gift not based on your behavior or ability to achieve it. Being loved inseparably loved by God because of the work of Jesus - nothing changes your standing - union with Christ - you are as secure as Jesus is.

It is mind-blowing when it hits home. That the Creator of the universe would choose to relate to rebels, and serve them, sacrifice for them, love them.

Here is this band of believers bringing the gospel - first to a place of prayer. Following Paul’s usual strategy, start at synagogues then work out from there. The Roman colony of Philippi most likely did not have a Jewish population large enough to warrant a synagogue, those that feared God found a place near the river to pray. To seek God’s care.

This is where they go. Relatively a place of comfort, peace... and seeming affluence. This is where they meet Lydia and preach Jesus. The seller of purple goods. Dyes and fabrics of royalty. Wealthy, well-connected.

This vignette represents the places and the people we dream about! This is the perfect situation - those hungry for God, and well-heeled, all gathered in the same place. Ideal. And they spoke of Jesus - that’s all they ever did!

The gospel goes into this situation. It is what the disciples bring with them, it is what they share with every open ear. And it is effective, it does the work we expect it to do. A church is planted in this moment.

The church of Philippi that Paul loves, that is generous and resilient.

Lydia doesn’t have many needs. She is wealthy, her home becomes the place of worship for the church. She has influence, renown in her own right. Why would she need the gospel? While it might be harder to recognize our need as we are numbed by our toys, or even the pressure to keep it up... everyone is in need of forgiveness. Everyone is in need of the easy yoke of Jesus - the opposite, either rich or poor is unbearable burden leading to death.

“The Gospel carries us through the prosperous times too....maybe more applicable for our context.” That we can rest in Christ’s finished work. That our identity is secured somewhere other than our neighborhood or retirement account. Life not based on our ability to keep it together but Jesus’ sustaining all things by the power of his word!

So it is for us. All rich by some standard. But the gospel not only goes all the way up, it also goes all the way down.

It goes to prison! The gospel goes but it may find violent opposition as it does.

As they were going to the place of prayer, a slave oppressed by a spirit of divination - fortune-telling, started following them and announcing who they were. More than just a random self-appointed magician, this is a young woman owned and monetized - for the benefit of her owners. And she was a cash cow.

Annoyed, Paul commands the spirit to leave in the name of Jesus - and we see justice flowing again through the gospel. When people are set free - someone usually doesn’t appreciate it.

Makes me think of Agape International Mission - 12 programs in Cambodia, to rescue women and girls from sex trafficking, with great success. They help them gain legal freedom and bring them the gospel to find spiritual freedom. Amazing work. But when a media outlet highlighted their work, the Cambodian government didn’t like the light it presented the situation - attempted to shut them down.

Even inside the “church.” Thinking of a hero in our day Rachael Denhollander, fight against institutional sexual abuse - and when it comes to the church, how quickly the arrows are pointed at her instead of the unrepentant celebrity leaders...

When we venture into territory of injustice and captivity, there will be opposition. And the owners of the girl accuse the missionaries before the town counsel and they stripped them to humiliate them and beat them with rods.

They are jailed - but our God is a chain-breaking God - and they go on praying and singing hymns to God. The gospel has gone with them in the dungeon. And everyone there heard them.

The Gospel empowers us to worship and serve God in painful circumstances (jail, beatings, job loss, broken relationships, sick children, painful diagnosis). Because we have been rescued by Jesus, everything else must submit to that truth, it certainly won’t be easy, but we have a place of rest, even as the chains rub our arms raw, we can sing of the grace of Christ.

An earthquake comes and all of the shackles fall off. The doors to the prison are opened. They did not view their freedom as a means of escape, however, but as an opportunity for witness. As a result the jailer and his household became believers.

Freaked, the jailer is ready to take his own life - in despair. But the disciples are quick to call him back from the edge as they haven't escaped. The gospel goes to the pit of darkness. "What must I do to be saved?"

"God rescues this man... Paul and Silas do not tell the jailer to clean up his life. They do not exhort him to forsake any particular sin. They do not tell him to do anything. Rather, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Trusting faith in Christ, apart from anything we bring to the table, is all that is required to be saved from what we rightly deserve: condemnation and hell. This is the promise of grace to us, as individuals, and it extends to ur households as well."

I love that the first thing he does in response is to care for others. He washes their wounds from the beating and is baptized. "He washed and was washed; he washed them from their stripes, and was himself washed from his sins" Chrysostom

Salvation comes to his household - family and more - it is far-reaching. Sometimes Jesus will shake the earth to get to you!

So from the heights - the expected places and people, to the depths - the unexpected, the gospel goes - it brings salvation, freedom, healing and hope.

The gospel goes wherever you are. It is what we have - it is what redeems a culture - it is what changes the script - it is what transforms our expectations, and priorities. And we are the ones meant to take it everywhere with us.

Not just on the perfect little mission trip, but into all of life. The forgiveness of Christ is there, in every corner of life, we are to own it and expose it to others along the way.

2) The Gospel demands a response

If this stuff of Christ is true - if he really is the God-man, that lived, died and rose again, we have to respond to it, believe it or reject it. We see this in the story, that there was either acceptance or refusal.

Violent rejection - money lost for the owners of the oppressed, they rage against it. Drummed up charges that what these men are preaching will upturn normal life! "Hell No" to forgiveness of sin by the work of Jesus.

It also follows that indifference is rejection. There doesn't seem to be a middle-of-the-road, "oh that is nice for the right times" approach to the good news of Jesus. We are not meant to be lukewarm toward it. Meh.

For those that don't reject it, but embrace it and find forgiveness, **Belief and Baptism** are the response.

It might make perfect sense - or it might come after a near-death experience.

Both Lydia and the Jailer believe in Jesus and take the step of publicly announcing their belief. It is great that Lydia is baptized - as a seller of dyes, baptizo is actually a word related to dying fabric. When the wool is immersed in the dye its value, its identity changes. The goods that she sells were once not purple but were made that way by being baptizo'ed in purple dye. It is the same with us, in the waters of baptism, we are being identified with Christ - this is where we have placed our hope and confidence.

Acts 16:31 "And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (ESV)

There is nothing stopping you from believing and being identified with Jesus. That is the right response - the decision with eternal implications - and it is what we invite everyone else into. To live full-out for it. A first step of obedience into a life of forgiveness and bringing this cool water of the gospel to parched souls.

And in doing so we can have hope because it is the Lord who opens hearts. **Acts 16:14** "...The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." (ESV)

"Conversion takes places not when we open our hearts but when God intervenes and changes the dispositions of our hearts. What was true for Lydia is true for every convert in Christian history. It takes a work of God to change the soul of a human being."

Not only that - but he will sovereignly work to bring you to a place of recognizing your need - an open jail!

The Lord is the One who graciously opens hearts to repent and believe the gospel. And he loves to do it!

So we keep going, because there are people we love that still reject Jesus. We keep going because there are people we have never met living as slaves to sin and even cruel owners, that God desires to give freedom.

From the neighborhoods of Poway, to the streets of Escondido. From the South American mountains, to the jungles of South Asia. From the hearts of little kids just starting the adventure of life to the minds of those nearing the end.

The gospel goes wherever you are.

Respond to it:

Believe in Jesus. That forgiveness is given in him, by his work on the cross for you, in the gift of his grace and righteousness for you.

Rest in the gospel. Give up your self-improvement schemes and run to the rest of Jesus. Find the power to live in the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. Ask for help.

Go with the gospel. Ask for eyes to see the opportunities. The ways you are meant to work for the renewal of others and all things. And take us with you! As a family on mission for the renown of Jesus.

It might be at the gym when your training buddy says he is ready to hear one of your “God speeches.” It might be listening to the great missionary who says “I’ll go down into the pit, but who will hold the rope?” and you find yourself raising your hand.

It might be in your home, caring for your children. It might be in your work bringing purpose to the toil. It might be in your drive to a new church building...

The Gospel goes wherever you are. Let’s go with it.