

DIVISION, DISCOVERY, & DIRECTION

Paul's Philippian Experience #1

A Brief History of Paul's Journey To Philippi

Next month I'm going to start a series of sermons on the book of Philippians. I'll walk through the book chapter by chapter and verse by verse. But before I do I am going to spend several weeks setting the stage for his visit. We'll begin by looking at the 15th and 16th chapters of Acts. We're starting there because several significant events happened to Paul prior to coming to Philippi and they are mentioned in these chapters.

We find the first event happening in:

ACTS 15:36-41

"After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.' Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

DIVISION

So the first thing that happened was division. Paul, the foremost apostle to the Gentiles, called to the work by God Himself, so sharply disagreed with his companion Barnabas that they separated. Remember, this is the Barnabas who was not afraid to go and get Paul and bring him to Jerusalem to meet the Apostles. He is also the same Barnabas who was called out by the Holy Spirit to accompany Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-4).

So they have a long history of ministry together, and I'm sure because of that, a deep affection and trust had developed between the two of them. But now they are now in sharp disagreement with each other over the thought of taking Mark on their second journey. Mark was a cousin of Barnabas. He lived in Jerusalem and it was his mother's house in which the believers prayed for Peter's release from prison. So Mark had some experience with the persecution of believers, albeit behind the walls of his mother's house.

Mark had gone with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey but had separated from them at Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem rather than going on with them to do the work of spreading the gospel (Acts 13:13). We don't know why Mark left, but we do know his leaving did not sit well with Paul.

Because of his negative experience with Mark, Paul held some definite misgivings about Mark's reliability. Barnabas, known as the Son of encouragement, shared the same negative experience with Paul but he must have felt Mark had learned his lesson because he was willing to give Mark a second chance. Paul was not. And neither would yield to the other.

So after perhaps as many as 15 years ministering together, relying on one another for strength and encouragement they spilt up. Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus and Paul gathered Silas and headed to Derbe. Opposing view headed in opposing directions. This is certainly not an encouraging sign of unity from two highly respected men of God

Which one of them was right? We don't know the answer. If there is any clue it would be found in [Acts 15:40](#) where it says that Paul and Silas were "*commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord*". It does not say this about the departure of Barnabas and Mark. But all we are really left with is that two good men could not agree and a breach in their relationship occurred.

Did they regret this decision? We don't know the answer to this either. The duo of Paul and Barnabas is only mentioned again in Scripture as historical fact. But we do know that Paul values Mark later in life. He calls him "his son" (1 Peter 5:13) and his "fellow worker" (Philemon 1:24). He also tells the Colossians to "welcome him" (Colossians 4:10) and tells Timothy to bring Mark with him when he comes to visit because "he is useful to me for service" (2 Timothy 4:11). However it happened, over time Mark had proved himself a faithful companion, going from someone whom Paul mistrusted to someone he recommended as useful for service.

What can we learn from this event? God will not allow the enemy to win. Nor will He allow the enemy to thwart His plans.

Even when the enemy wins the battle of separating fellow believers from one another God has someone else waiting in the wings, someone He has prepared to help heal the wound of lost companionship. God's part is to supply the need. Our part is to remain faithful.

Both Barnabas and Paul could have decided not to go on the journey; after all, the Holy Spirit had set them both apart to do His work. They were to do it together. The work still needed to be done but they couldn't agree on one important matter so they split up, deciding to go their separate ways. It's a heart breaking thing to experience when friendships and ministries divide. But God's plan was not thwarted. Silas was waiting in the wings.

But where did Silas come from? And how is it that he was available and willing to go with Paul?

You may remember that at one point some of the believing Pharisees determined that it was necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them over this issue so they were encouraged to go to Jerusalem to address it. They reported to the Apostles and elders of Jerusalem the miraculous work that God had done among the Gentiles through their hands, and that God was not making any distinction between the Jews who believed and the Gentiles who also believed.

After listening the apostles and elders chose to send men along with Paul and Barnabas to take a letter to the Gentiles giving them these few instructions: "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication." Well, just by coincidence they decided to send Barsabas and Silas along with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter to the Gentiles. And in another miraculous "coincidence", Barsabas returned but the Scriptures say, "*it seemed good to Silas to remain there.*"

So Silas was already there when Paul and Barnabas split up. A coincidence? No. God knows the future. He knows our heart. God had Silas waiting in the wings and brought him forward when the time was right.

If you have been in disagreement with someone and can't seem to resolve the issue, put your trust in the Healer of hearts. Don't let discouragement pull you away from the work God has called you to do. Remember, "*The thief comes to steal and destroy*" (John 10:10). Don't let the enemy steal away the gift of friendship God has given you nor the ministry to which He has called you. Seek restoration. [Romans 12:18](#)

says, *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men”*. But if a separation should occur, God will bring forth what you need when you need it. There will be a Silas waiting in the wings. You can trust your future to the One who holds it in His hands. He will not forsake you.

DISCOVERY

The second thing that happened to Paul before he arrived at Philippi was discovering a new disciple.

ACTS 16:1-3

“Paul came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him.”

Timothy must have made a good first impression because along with the recommendation of the brethren Paul decided Timothy was someone he wanted with him on his journey.

What Timothy had that Paul felt Mark lacked we do not know. But there was an instant connection between the two. Paul would later call Timothy his “son in the faith” and “close companion”. Paul came to trust Timothy so implicitly that he left him in charge of the church at Ephesus as his authority and fellow teacher.

So not only did God provide Silas as a companion to Paul, but Timothy as well. Someone whom Paul had yet to meet God had already set aside as a companion for Paul.

What can we learn from this event? You never know what God has in store for you unless you start the journey.

If Paul had not remained obedient to the call of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, he would have stayed in Antioch nursing his wounds. But he stayed faithful to his call and left with Silas to do the job he was asked to do.

And as he was traveling he did not let a separated friendship keep him from seeking out new companions. He did not let his negative experience with Mark or his disagreement with Barnabas prevent him from seeing the potential of service in others. As a result he gained a life-long companion and friend whom he trusted with his life and to whom he trusted his churches.

Our journey of faith may be interrupted by disagreements and separations. And I believe the enemy uses these for evil intentions in order to stop the progress of the gospel not only in the lives of others but in our own lives as well. Instead of seeing how our differences can unite us as one unit for the purpose of spreading the Kingdom of God, we only see how they separate us.

I do not believe Paul had an issue of forgiveness with Mark. I believe Paul was rightly concerned about the hardships which they had and would endure and that Mark had not yet proved himself able to handle these pressures. It was as much for Mark’s sake as it was for his own that Paul refused to take Mark with them.

But we often do separate because of unforgiveness. God desires unity and asks us to forgive as we have been forgiven. We will not minister side-by-side with everyone, but when God joins us together let’s make sure it is God that is separating us for His own purpose and not we ourselves causing the separation because we refuse to forgive and cannot see how God can use our differences to unite us.

DISAPPOINTMENT

The third thing that happened to Paul was that he was disappointed twice in his attempts to preach the gospel to the unsaved. We read about this further in Acts 16.

ACTS 16:4-5

“Now while they (Paul, Silas, Luke & Timothy) were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.”

So far, so good. They are delivering the report from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and the churches were doing great – they were being strengthened in the faith and increasing in number daily. Surely God is blessing this journey in spite of its rocky start. But let’s read on.

ACTS 16:6-8

“They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go in to Bythynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas....”

The Asia referred to here is best known by us as Asia Minor, or Anatolia. It is the western most protrusion of land in modern day Turkey. Bithynia was a Roman province located in the northwest region of Asia Minor. On their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas had gotten to the edge of Asia Minor to the city of Antioch in the land of Pisidia. Now Paul, Silas and Timothy were looking to take the gospel into Asia as well. But the Spirit of Jesus would not permit it.

What’s up with that? Why would God stop Paul from doing what God Himself had called Paul to do? How do you explain being told not to do something you were actually instructed to do? And by the very One who told you to do it? This is certainly a case where *“My thoughts are not your thoughts nor My ways your ways”* applies (Isaiah 55:8), as well as *“Who can ever know what is in the Lord’s mind?”* (1 Corinthians 2:16).

We are not told know why the Spirit would not permit Paul to go into these areas. But we do know that Peter sends his greeting to the chosen who are scattered throughout Asia and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1). So God was not opposed to the gospel being preached there. Only that Paul was not the one to do it at that time.

Which brings is to the fourth and final thing that happened to Paul before he got to Philippi and the real reason for his being there. He received:

DIRECTION

We read about this in

ACTS 16:9-12:

“A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

“So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi...and we were staying in this city for some days.”

Wow. Finally an answer; Finally a breakthrough; Finally an open door for ministry. But before we see what lesson there is to learn let's take a look at where Macedonia was located and what type of city Philippi was to get some clues as to why the Spirit of Jesus might have led Paul and his companions there.

Macedonia is a geographic and historical region of Greece in the southern Balkans. Macedonia is the largest and second most populous Greek region, dominated by mountains in the interior and the port cities of Thessaloniki (or Salonika) and Kavala on its southern coastline. Macedonia is part of Northern Greece, together with Thrace and sometimes Thessaly and Epirus.

It incorporates most of the territories of ancient Macedon, a kingdom ruled by the Argeads whose most celebrated members were Alexander the Great and his father Philip II. The name Macedonia was later applied to identify various administrative areas in the Roman and Byzantine Empires with widely differing borders. Even before the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1830, it was identified as a Greek province, but without clearly defined geographical borders.

The city of Philippi was originally named for Philip II of Macedon, who was the father of Alexander the Great. In 42 BC Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius in the Roman civil war at Philippi. In 30 BC, after the defeat of Mark Antony at the battle of Actium, Octavian (now known as Augustus) raised the city's status as a colony and snatched land allotments from the native population, giving them to veterans of this war to ensure their loyalty to him as their patron.

Philippi was located in Macedonia, about ten miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was known as a miniature Rome, its inhabitants enjoying the privileges of Roman citizenship. It was also known as the gateway to Europe because it lay on the main road between the eastern provinces and Rome. Rome made Philippi the political and commercial center of eastern Macedonia. Its seaport was Neapolis, ten miles to the east, to which Paul sailed.

So Philippi was a very substantial city and one of great significance. There would have been many travelers and people of influence in this city.

What can we learn from these events? When God says, “No” seek after the “Yes”.

God's “No” does not mean He is through using us. Ecclesiastes reminds us that *“For everything there is a season and a time.”* This may not be the season or time for you to accomplish what you desire to do or go to the place you desire to go. But that doesn't mean that God will not give you another desire or another destination in line with His will.

Life is full of disappointments. If we were to stop any forward momentum and question our purpose in life because we experienced disappointment we would succumb to the ploys of the enemy and be useless to the Master. Just because a door of opportunity stands before us does not mean God will open it. God knows which doors need to remain closed and which doors will be open to us. If God withholds something it's only because He has something better to give.

When Paul got a “No” about going to Asia he kept looking for the “Yes”. If not Asia, then where? Bithynia? If not Bithynia, then where? He did not question his purpose, only his destination. He was not rearranging his priorities, only his travel plans. He did not harden his heart because he couldn't go where he wanted to go. He did not quench or resist the Spirit because he wanted something the Spirit did not want him to have. He listened and heeded the voice of the Spirit.

After so many “No’s” Paul received his “Yes.” The Spirit was no longer resisting his efforts to preach the gospel. He was told where to go to do that which God had called him to do. Did it matter to Paul why he could not preach in Asia or Bithynia? No. What mattered to him was that he was able to fulfill God’s call on his life to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. If God said that would be Macedonia and not Asia, so be it. He didn’t waste any time lamenting over Asia. He had work to do in Macedonia and he set sail immediately in order to do so.

In the midst of the “No”, God was still intent on using Paul. He had places where Paul was needed but Asia was not one of them. Neither was Bithynia. Paul understood this and obeyed the Spirit’s leading. If we are to understand this we too must obey the voice of the Spirit.

So what have we discovered about Paul’s trip to Philippi? On the road to fulfill God’s call Paul:

- 1) Experienced **Division** (a separation from his constant companion, Barnabas)
- 2) **Discovered** a new Disciple (Timothy, his “son in the faith” and “close companion”)
- 3) Grappled with **Disappointment** (the Spirit of Jesus forbid him to go into Asia and Bithynia)
- 4) And was given Divine **Direction** (he saw a vision of a man from Macedonia telling him to come over to Macedonia and help them)

And what did we learn from these events in Paul’s life?

- 1) **God will not allow the enemy to win.** Nor will he allow the enemy to thwart His plans. Whatever we lack God will provide. And no amount of disagreement or separation will stop the work of God. If there is a need God will supply the need. Our part is to remain faithful to His call.
- 2) **You never know what God has in store for you unless you start the journey.** Don’t let negative experiences keep you from being obedient. Travel the road God has set out before you. You won’t find the treasure unless you travel the road.
- 3) **When God says, “No”, seek after the “Yes.”** Because when God withholds something it’s only because He has something better to give. If we truly desire to serve God it will not matter where or how we do it. It only matters that God is in it. When God says, “No”, seek after the “Yes”.

These are the things I observed and learned as I looked at these Scriptures. But how about you? What stood out to you as we walked through these episodes from Paul’s life? Did you learn other lessons besides the ones I mentioned?

Next week we will look at two additional things that happened to Paul while he was in Philippi and glean some more lessons from Paul’s journey to and from Philippi.

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