

Paul's Mission

Apostles and Epistles: part 2

The Story: part 29

April 30, 2017

DAY 1: The church, the body of Christ

1. How will the world see who Jesus Christ is? Amazingly, the world does get a chance to see “Jesus” when God’s people reflect something of who Jesus is, and relate to one another in ways that make it unmistakable that Jesus Christ is real.

2. The image Paul uses is that of a body. All the members of a body make up the whole body. Each part of the body has a unique function. Some parts of the body are seen, some are not. Each part of the body is important. The same is true in a church.

1 Corinthians 12:12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,

²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,

²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

1 Cor. 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

3. What strikes you about the “body and parts” imagery of the church?

4. What strikes you about the church being the “body of Christ?”

DAY 2: Antioch and Paul's first missionary journey

1. Saul of Tarsus was a zealous Jew who persecuted the church, arresting Christians, incarcerating them and overseeing the death of some. When Saul converted to Christianity it shook the world!
2. Saul spent three years in Arabia, immersing himself in the Old Testament prophecies, especially regarding the Messiah.
3. Eventually, Saul became known as Paul, and was called to Antioch by Barnabas to help with the ministry there. He rose in leadership and influence. Antioch would become the hub of the early missionary movement.

Acts 11:25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

4. While Barnabas and Paul led the ministry in Antioch, God gave them new direction.

Acts 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

5. This was the first of Paul's three missionary journeys. This journey took Barnabas and Paul to the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in Asia Minor.

6. The message of the gospel was preached, as Paul was empowered to do signs and wonders which corroborated the message. The little team met with some success, but also with violent persecution, especially in Lystra.

Acts 14:19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

7. What would you have done if you had been stoned for the faith, drug outside the city and left for dead?

Acts 14:20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city.

The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.²¹ They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

8. What strikes you about the apostle Paul?

DAY 3: Paul's second missionary journey

1. Paul's second missionary journey took him into Asia Minor, and then, at the Holy Spirit's leadership into Europe! Today, we'll look at an important event in the birth of the church at Philippi.

Acts 16:22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

2. Once again, Paul receives terrible persecution, being severely flogged and jailed! If you had been Paul and Silas, what would have been your response that night as you sat in a foreign jail?

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.

²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

3. Why do you think Paul and Silas did not flee the jail when the earthquake opened all the jail's doors?

Acts 16:29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

4. What are at least two reasons that the jailer was ready to hear the gospel message?

Acts 16:31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.

³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.

³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.

5. What evidence of new life do you observe in the jailer?

6. What strikes you most from the apostle Paul at Philippi?

DAY 4: Paul's message in Athens

1. Paul's most well-known stop was at Athens where he spoke to the Greek's greatest philosophers at Mars Hill. Athens was "covered" with idols, every known idol man had invented was "represented" as Paul

Acts 17:22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

2. How does Paul establish connection with his audience?

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

3. How is Paul distinguishing the real God from the idols that littered Athens?

*Acts 17:27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'
²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man's design and skill.*

4. How does Paul personalize the gospel, and the God of the gospel to the Athenians?

Acts 17:30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

5. Paul now calls for a decision. With what important piece of information does he challenge the Athenians?

*Acts 17:32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."
³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*

6. What strikes you from Paul's message in Athens?

DAY 5: Paul's third missionary journey; the planting of the church at Ephesus

1. Paul took one more missionary journey, visiting many of the same cities in which he had previously planted new churches. He planted a church in the important port city of Ephesus during this journey, staying in Ephesus for two and a half years.
2. From Ephesus, in Asia Minor, Paul and his mission team returned to Europe. On the way back to Antioch, they stopped, once again, in Ephesus to meet with the elders of the newly formed church. Today, we'll look at his farewell words to them.

Acts 20:17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. ²² "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

²⁵ "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

³³ I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

³⁶ When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

3. What strikes you most about the apostle Paul?

4. Finish today, asking God to build some of the qualities you see in Paul into your life.