

Sunday 18th June 2023 Acts 16:1-5 - Peter Hollander

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ²The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Each one of us faces obstacles in our lives when it comes to following Christ and serving Him. Usually these are a result of either our own sin or someone else's sin or they are a result of simply living in a fallen sinful world. Timothy had a couple of things working against him. But God sent Paul to Timothy, probably on the first journey to Lystra and now Paul is back to spend more time helping Timothy so that he could be an effective evangelist and leader in the church. We know that God has promised that He will make us overcomers, and we can see from Paul's letters that Timothy became an overcomer of difficulties he faced.

As Paul believed he was to go back to strengthen the new believers so, he and Silas embark on their journey. They will be traveling back through the sites mentioned in Acts 14, which included Derbe and Lystra.

At Lystra...Paul healed a crippled man and the city hailed the missionaries as Hermes and Zeus. When the people found out they were not and when Paul told them to forsake these wicked gods, he was taken outside the city and stoned and left for dead. But Paul gets back up, goes into the same city and preaches the Gospel to them. He exhibits courage by returning.

Acts 14:21-23 *They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²²strengthening 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. ²³Paul 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.*

Paul and Barnabas won large numbers of disciples and Timothy was one of them. Timothy must have made a good impression as not only did the believers in Lystra and Iconium speak well of him, but Paul wanted to take him along with him, and he was young man, probably late teens. God led Paul to a young man who needed Paul's help. They needed each other really. Paul had a great desire to disciple young men so that when he was gone they could continue the work of bringing the Gospel to future generations. Throughout Paul's life we have Timothy first being taken under his wing and being instructed in the faith. We would also see Titus come along and then we would even see Paul disciple a runaway slave name Philemon. There were no doubt others not mentioned.

What obstacles did Timothy face? **First** he was the product of a mixed marriage: his mother and grandmother were Jewish and his father Greek. So Timothy was brought up to know some of the Hebrew scriptures and traditions from his mother and grandmother but lived in a pagan city with a non-believing father. He may well have gone to the synagogue with his mother, but was not circumcised on the eighth day like all Jewish boys. His mother and he had accepted Christ as Saviour, but we do not hear that his father did. **Second** – Timothy's faith grew with that of his mother and grandmother, but we don't hear of any fatherly input. Paul seems to have grasped that Timothy needed a spiritual father and not just a spiritual mother. That is as true for boys and girls today as it was then. Children need godly parents: mothers acting like mothers and fathers acting like fathers. Paul, who was unmarried and didn't have children, has become a father figure for Timothy. So let's look at what Timothy became, for some background beyond what Luke wrote in Acts.

2 Timothy 1-8 *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. ⁸So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.*

Paul calls Timothy his dear son. We don't know why Timothy was tearful, but his mother and grandmother are mentioned, and that the laying on of hands was something that would empower Timothy with the Holy Spirit and fill him with love and self-discipline. We know elsewhere that Timothy was a bit timid, but nonetheless later in life, was given the job of sorting out leadership problems in various churches.

We see a bit about Timothy in Paul's letters, along with instructions on how churches need to be run, because there were already false teachers and people lacking the right character to lead. Timothy is sent by Paul as someone to sort out these people and return the churches to the right track.

Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. After we've just read that circumcision was unnecessary, Timothy is circumcised so that he would have access to a Jewish audience in the same way Paul, Barnabas and Silas had access to preach to Jews because they were Jews. What Paul wanted to do is to take away any hindrance to the Gospel. Because he would be in various synagogues, he could proclaim Christ as a fully devoted Jewish worshipper. By the way, this was something he had never been able to do before. So, in order to save Jews, Timothy was willing to become a Jew for the sake of the Gospel and no other reason.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

This is an important Gospel principle. We should adjust our traditions, our dress, our eating habits, etc so as not to offend. We never want to do something that will distract from the Gospel. Timothy was circumcised so that the Jews who were being evangelized would not be sidetracked and want to discuss Timothy rather than Christ.

Becoming all things to all people never ever means we adjust the Gospel. We never change the message in the least but as the messengers, we must be accommodating to others.

This passage is important and helps us understand that Paul and Silas were still interested in evangelizing the Jews. They still practiced Jewish traditions in order to not be a stumbling block to the Jews. These practices, however, were social and not part of salvation in any way. The door was left open and Jews were invited into God's Kingdom through Christ. Paul and Timothy would issue the invitation...come to Christ and be saved.

As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Paul and Silas set out to strengthen the churches and they were strengthened. Do we see what happens when distractions are removed? This is Luke's point. If Timothy is to begin preaching in Jewish synagogues he must preach as a fully converted Jewish believer. One who cared so deeply that he would go to great lengths to be acceptable in the eyes of the people he sought to reach? In Paul's journeys, we see that he considers that he has an entitlement to be in a synagogue and to talk to Jews, because he is one. However his mission is to both Jew and Gentile, so he needed to advise them both that they need not obey all the dietary requirements to be a disciple of Jesus. As a result, the churches were strengthened and Jews and Gentiles were saved.

If you're here today as a young person, hopefully you can relate to Timothy. He felt timid and fearful at times. Have you ever experienced these things? He overcame because he had help. He had someone to remind him, love him and challenge him.

Perhaps you're here today as an older person. Is there someone you could invest some time in like Paul did Timothy? What ministry do you have to the next generation? Is there someone you know who is from a single parent home who could use the company and instruction of a godly man?