

Moving Into New Territory

20 September, 2009

By Rev. Lonny R. Bower (LRB)

Scripture Reference – Acts 16:6-40

Unit Theme: The Expanding Church

Central Truth: The Spirit will lead Christians to present the Gospel to unbelievers.

Key Verse: Romans 12:1, 2

Introduction:

Before ascending Jesus told His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless, but that He would send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). The Purpose of sending the Holy Spirit may not have been immediately clear to His disciples, just as it isn't clear to many today. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth (He is still doing this today) and that through Him they would be witnesses (John 16:3, Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit empowers us to witness and if we let Him, He leads us into situations where we'll have the opportunity to fulfill His purpose – share the Gospel with the lost. As we look at our lesson today, note how the Spirit leads with intent, intent on enabling us to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19); for this is His purpose, to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

I. The Spirit Guides – Acts 16:6-10

Psalm 27:11 “Says *teach me your way oh Lord and lead me in a smooth path*”. Isn't this what we all want, a smooth path? Many are absolutely terrified of the unknown, but this is where the Spirit will often lead us. He may not permit us to stay or go where we will be the most comfortable or even experience the least amount of danger, but He will lead us where He has a harvest for us (**John 4:38**). However, we have to be willing to go.

➤ Think about it:

Has the Spirit ever prevented you from going somewhere only to reveal a greater purpose later on?

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“The Holy Spirit can't save saints or seats. If we don't know any non-Christians, how can we introduce them to the Savior?”—Paul Little

II. The Lord Opens Hearts – Acts 16:11-15

Long before we ever begin to minister, the Lord has already prepared the heart of those to whom He sends us. We often think that we have to open the door, that we have to change the heart, however, this is not the case. The Lord opens the door and He is the one who brings change to

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the heart so that the Gospel can be received. Only when we begin to minister from this perspective, is God able to do what He longs to do – change the heart. Take another look at verse 13; was their intent to go and preach or to go and pray, maybe both? It has been my observation that when my intent is on worshipping God and I do so in the proper attitude, then He opens doors for me to minister in many different ways to many different people. Romans 12:1, 2 describe God’s plan for our lives, a plan that we would all do well to reevaluate and see where we stand. Do we find it difficult to prove God’s good and acceptable will? If so, perhaps we need to start presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable...after all, this is the least we should do.

➤ **Think about it:**

Has God ever used you in an unexpected way during worship service?

Has it ever occurred to you that it just may be His desire to do so?

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“Praise God even when you don’t understand what He is doing.” —*Henry Jacobsen*

III. The Gospel Changes Lives Acts – 16:16-24

I often wonder how many people are still bound because I (or God’s people) didn’t turn and speak God’s word to them. Here we have an example of frustration meeting divine will. Paul became overwhelmingly frustrated with the actions of this girl, but note that he did not direct his frustration to the girl, but to the spirit controlling the girl. We stand to learn so much from this. How many times do we inappropriately direct our frustration at the person and as a result stop the will of God? However, when we do allow the Spirit to lead us and we see God deliver, restore and change lives, someone else, be it inside the church or outside the church, will get bent out of shape over it. They may in fact even oppose us on the matter and make life otherwise very difficult. Let me remind you that the enemy has come to steal (John 10:10a), he will stop at nothing to oppose the preaching of the Gospel! What may be surprising however, is who he uses to do it.

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➤ Think about it:

Have you ever seen God instantly deliver someone from a demonic spirit?

Are you able to discern when someone needs delivered? What did you do about it?

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“The gift of discernment is the God-given power to distinguish what comes from the Spirit of Truth and what comes from other possible sources.” —*French Arrington*

Conclusion – Acts 16:25-34

But at midnight – I like this phrase because it shows their genuine desire to present their bodies a living sacrifice. When we do this, it releases the power of God in our lives in ways that we never expected! It is my belief that the church refuses to do this and as a result knows not the power of God! Our purpose is to be a shining city on a hill – a reflector of His great light and as we reflect (lift) His light up men will be drawn unto Him (John 12:32). We are to do this in all circumstances, not just when life is great. The church has lost her purpose and has settled for a counterfeit, a form of godliness, a pseudo power that absorbs His light but does not reflect any. How many times do we receive the goodness and blessings of God, but never share them with others? It’s time to rediscover our purpose and that is to go and preach, to go and teach, to go and baptize, to go and make disciples of Christ and as we’re going to ever present our bodies a living sacrifice. The results of living such a life remain largely untold however. We should listen to the accounts of those who are living it, but even more we should emulate their actions and in turn begin to see God move in our own life and circumstances in ways that we never thought possible.

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