Acts 2024 Juan Seo (Aug 18, 2024)

**COME OVER TO MACEDONIA AND HELP US**

Acts 15:36-16:10

Key Verse 16:9

**During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”**

Last week, we learned about the Jerusalem Council. What is the core Christian truth that was confirmed at the council? ***"It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved"*** (15:11). It is truly important to always remember this truth and live by the grace of Jesus Christ. Now, we are going to learn about Paul’s second missionary journey. Today’s passage focuses on the conflict that occurred between Paul and Barnabas before the journey and how Paul’s mission team was led by the Holy Spirit to go to Europe.Through today's passage, I would like to share three important spiritual lessons with you.

***First, God works all things together for good.***

Paul and Barnabas are great servants of God. They established the Antioch church as a missionary-sending church. They preached the gospel of Jesus powerfully in Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Along the way, they endured much persecution and hardship. However, they were also weak human beings and eventually parted ways. What was the reason for their separation? Paul suggested to Barnabas that they visit all the towns where they had preached the gospel to see how they were doing (36). Even at that time, there was no problem in their relationship. However, they had a sharp disagreement about taking Mark with them on the missionary journey.

Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey as their helper. However, when they reached Perga in Pamphylia, Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. The author, Luke, does not explain why Mark returned to Jerusalem in the middle of the missionary journey. Some scholars say that he was homesick, that he was physically weak, or that he opposed Paul’s leadership. But the exact reason remains unclear. What is clear is that Paul was deeply disappointed in Mark. Paul did not think it wise to take him. On the other hand, Barnabas wanted to give Mark another opportunity, allowing him to redeem his failure and grow into a useful servant in God’s work. Paul had clear objectives of their missionary journey. He wanted to care for the young believers in the mission fields and strengthen their faith. Additionally, if possible, he wanted to preach the gospel in the surrounding towns. Paul seemed to believe that taking Mark would hinder his objectives. As a result, Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement and parted ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia.

Couldn’t they reach an agreement by making concessions to each other? Was it truly beneficial for God’s work that such great servants of the church separated over this issue? How do you think the believers in the Antioch church felt as they saw this conflict? They must have felt a crisis in their church’s leadership and been worried. It’s natural for people to have different perspectives and opinions. Sometimes those differences can be so significant that they lead to intense debates or even separation. However, the issue is that, during that process, they hurt each other, did not reconcile, and broke the unity. I wonder how wonderful it would have been if, even though they took different paths, they had prayed for and blessed each other.

However, God works all things together for good, despite our human weaknesses and sins. God wonderfully blessed Paul’s missionary journey and also blessed Barnabas in helping Mark become a great leader in the church. From Acts 16 onwards, we see the remarkable story of how Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, spread the gospel in Asia Minor and Europe. Additionally, Mark’s name is frequently mentioned in the Bible. In Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 1:24, it is recorded that Mark was with Paul in prison in Rome. And in 2 Timothy 4:11, we find Paul writing to Timothy, saying, ***“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”*** This shows that Paul recognized Mark as a man of God and that their relationship was fully restored.

Additionally, Mark was very close to the Apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter refers to Mark as 'my son.' Mark served as Peter’s interpreter, and based on Peter’s preaching, Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark, which is the first of the four Gospels and greatly influenced the other Gospel writers. Mark was able to become such a great servant of God because Barnabas embraced, served, and helped him. In fact, without Barnabas’ help, Paul might not have become the great servant of God that he was. Therefore, Barnabas truly lived up to his name, 'son of encouragement.' It is God who blessed Paul’s missionary work and raised Mark to be a great servant. We praise God, who works all things together for good. We should love one another and achieve unity among us, which is God’s will. May God help us be united, bear much fruit in fulfilling God’s mission, and give glory to Him.

***Second, God Himself plans, leads, and accomplishes His mission.***

Paul went through Syria and Cilicia and came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where he had preached the gospel during his first missionary journey. Who were the members of Paul’s mission team? 15:40 says, ***“Paul chose Silas.”*** Silas was a prophet from the Jerusalem church who represented the church in delivering the Jerusalem Council’s decision to the Antioch church. Silas was deeply moved by the work of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles in Antioch and decided to remain there. Seeing that Silas was a mature and spiritual servant of the Lord, Paul invited him to join his second missionary journey. Silas gladly accepted the invitation. Acts 16:4 says, ***“As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.”*** Silas was the right person for this important task.

Another member of Paul’s mission team was Timothy. Acts 16:1-3 records the process of Paul taking Timothy on the missionary journey. Timothy was from Lystra and likely accepted Jesus during Paul’s first missionary journey. He had a sincere faith in Jesus Christ, influenced by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim 1:5). As a result, he was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul recognized that Timothy was a promising servant for God’s mission. He saw God’s plan for Timothy and desired to bring him along on his missionary journey. However, while Timothy’s mother was a Jew, his father was a Greek. According to Jewish custom, a person with a Jewish mother is recognized as a Jew. Yet, Timothy had not been circumcised. For a Jew to be uncircumcised was highly offensive to other Jews. Because of this, Paul circumcised him. This action by Paul can be puzzling to us. Paul had fought against the legalists, arguing that Gentiles are saved by the grace of Jesus and do not need to be circumcised. He also put great effort into informing the Gentile believers of the Jerusalem Council’s decision. Yet, he circumcised Timothy. Why? 1 Corinthians 9:22 says, ***“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”*** The Apostle Paul, in order to help as many people as possible accept the gospel of Christ, became like a Jew to the Jews, and to those under the law, he became like one under the law, though he himself was not under the law. Paul’s decision to circumcise Timothy was not about keeping the law but about removing any obstacles to spreading the gospel. In this sense, Paul was truly a free man. Afterward, Timothy served as Paul’s closest coworker and carried out many important ministries.

Additionally, even though his name is not explicitly mentioned, we can see that Luke, the author of Acts, was a member of Paul’s mission team. In Acts 16:10, it says, ***“After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”*** This is the first time the pronoun 'we' is used, which includes the author, Luke. Luke was a physician (Col. 4:14) who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey and was with him when Paul was imprisoned in Rome (2 Tim. 4:11).

The Apostle Paul’s second missionary journey was guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit led the mission team in a direction that was very different from what Paul had planned. In Acts 16:6-10, we see that Paul’s mission team initially intended to preach the gospel in the region of Asia Minor. However, the Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia (6). So, they traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, which is located to the north, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to (7). Therefore, they passed by Mysia and continued westward until they reached Troas (8). Troas was located in the northwest of Asia Minor and served as an important seaport in the Roman Empire for those traveling between Asia Minor and Macedonia.

We do not know exactly how the Holy Spirit blocked their way. Perhaps the roads were closed, there was a landslide, or they became ill. We might ask, 'Does the Holy Spirit even prevent us from doing mission work?' One might think, 'If we want to preach the gospel wherever we go, shouldn't the Holy Spirit be pleased and bless us?' But we must recognize that it is the Triune God who leads God’s mission. Our role is to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and participate in God’s work. Therefore, we must be spiritually awake to seek, discover, and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit. Then we will please God and bear abundant fruit for His glory.

Paul, having arrived in Troas unintentionally, must have felt great trouble in his heart. He must have wondered why the Holy Spirit was blocking their way and questioned what God’s will was. Look at verse 9: ***“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”*** During the night, Paul was not sleeping. He was praying. He couldn’t sleep. And in prayer, he had a vision of a man of Macedonia. The man was standing and begging, ***“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*** God revealed His will to Paul through this vision. God’s direction was not to go to Asia or the northern regions, but to cross the Mediterranean and go to Macedonia in Europe to preach the gospel. This was beyond what Paul’s mission team had planned or expected. And this direction was God’s plan to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the end of the earth.

What did the mission team do after receiving this vision? Please look at v. 10. They got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel to them. Finally, they were able to discern what God’s will was. And they immediately obeyed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As a result, they could experience the great work of the Holy Spirit while preaching the gospel in regions such as Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth.

Through this passage, we learn how we can discern God’s will. First, we need to pray and ask God to reveal His will to us. Then, we need to receive conviction from the Holy Spirit through the word of God. Additionally, we need to share the conviction we received with our community of faith and go through a validation process. Paul shared the vision he saw with his mission team members, and they made a communal decision together. In this way, we can discern God’s will more accurately and fulfill God’s mission according to His will. I pray that we become a Spirit-filled community that seeks, discovers, and follows God’s will together.

***Third, God wants us to participate in His mission with a shepherd’s heart.***

What was the appearance of the man of Macedonia in the vision? He was standing and begging Paul, ***“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*** How would you feel if someone appears in your dream, weeping and begging, “Please help us”? Why did God show Paul such a dramatic image of the Macedonian man? It was because God wanted Paul to have a shepherd’s heart for the people of Macedonia. God wanted Paul to see that they desperately needed the gospel, and to have a heart of compassion to help them. There are so many people in America and the world who desperately need the gospel. How can we have a broken shepherd’s heart for these people? We cannot fully understand their situation or have a broken shepherd’s heart through imagination alone. We must first feel God’s broken heart for the dying souls without the gospel. And we need to feel, either through direct or indirect experience, how much they are suffering without the gospel and how desperately they need it.

God opened the door for preaching the gospel of Jesus in Europe through this vision. Christianity grew in Europe, and Europe was greatly used in God's world mission work. However, Christianity in Europe is now dying. Churches are closing, and Europeans are denying God. Those among us who attended the European Bible conference witnessed this. Europeans are in desperate need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Recently, our mission team visited Belize and experienced the lives of the people living there. They witnessed and experienced how much Msn. Moses and Sarah Chang sacrifice and dedicate themselves to serving the Belizean college students. I believe they have a shepherd’s heart for the people of Belize. Today, Msn. Esteban Cho from Bolivia joined our worship service. He has a broken shepherd's heart for the people of Latin America, including those in Bolivia and Peru. It is because he lived in Latin America, experienced their lives, and realized how desperately they need the gospel. That is why going on short-term mission trips is necessary. We pray that we may broaden our hearts and be able to see the people around the world who need the gospel. Think about the American college students who are spiritually dying because they don’t know the meaning of life and are addicted to drugs and games. Don’t you feel a shepherd's heart for them? ***"Come over to Macedonia and help us!"*** I pray that we may broaden our hearts and be able to see the people around the world who need the gospel. May we become servants of God who understand God’s heart for those who are spiritually perishing and share the gospel of Jesus with a shepherd’s heart.