Acts 2024 Juan Seo (Aug 25, 2024)

**BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS, AND YOU WILL BE SAVED**

Acts 16:11-40

Key Verse 16:31

**They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”**

Last week, we learned that Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia saying, ***“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*** In response, the mission team composed of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit and opened the door to the mission in Europe. They sailed straight from Troas to Samothrace, and the next day, they went on to Neapolis. From there, they traveled to Philippi. Today's passage tells the story of how the church of Jesus Christ was established in Philippi. We have already learned about the most important concept in understanding God’s mission: ***“The main agent of mission is the Triune God, and we are co-workers who participate in God’s mission.”*** On this foundation, I would like to share how we can participate in God’s mission. In today’s passage, we discover three important practices.

***First, we can participate in God’s mission through prayer.***

On the first Sabbath in Philippi, Paul’s mission team went outside the city gate to the river. Why did they go there? Verse 13 says they expected to find a place of prayer. It seems that there was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi. Paul thought he could meet some people gathered by the river to pray. Indeed, they met a group of women there. These women had also come to pray on the Sabbath. Paul’s mission team prayed and shared the gospel with these women. This is how the mission in Philippi began. The story of God’s mission begins with prayer. Without prayer, we cannot participate in God’s mission. If we truly believe that God is the main agent of mission, then we must pray. How can we seek God’s guidance and obey His will without prayer? When the mission team met Lydia by the river, they were praying. When they cast out the evil spirit that was tormenting a female slave, they were on their way to the place of prayer. The work of salvation for the jailer and his household began when Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God in prison.

When we go to the mission field, it is important to first find a place for prayer. Then, we should pray that God sends the people He has chosen. At the Central University of Venezuela in Caracas, there is a plaza called “Tierra de Nadie” (no man’s land). The meaning behind this name is that the place doesn’t belong to anyone in particular, so everyone is welcome there. We called that place “Tierra de Dios” (God’s land) and used it as a place to pray and evangelize. I remember meeting many students there and sharing the gospel with them. We are currently praying to share the gospel with college students in New York. May we first find places for prayer at campuses, pray, seek God’s guidance, and obey as we serve God’s mission.

***Second, we can participate in God’s mission by sharing the gospel of salvation with one person God sends us.***

How was the church in Philippi established? It was established as Paul’s mission team shared the gospel of salvation with those God sent them one by one. Paul’s mission team shared the gospel with women gathered by the river. It would not have been easy for men to approach women and preach the gospel. However, the mission team didn’t care whether their audience was male or female, Jew or Gentile. They were ready to share the gospel with anyone, regardless of race or gender. And what happened as a result?

Look at verse 14: ***“One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”*** Among the women who were listening to the gospel, one opened her heart to Paul’s message, and her name was Lydia. In fact, Lydia might not have been her real name. This is because she was from the city of Thyatira, which is located in the district of Lydia on the western side of Asia Minor. So, "Lydia" was actually the name of a region. It’s likely that she was called Lydia because she was from the district of Lydia. Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth, which was a very expensive fabric at that time. She was likely a wealthy and successful businesswoman who owned a large house.

And Lydia was a worshiper of God. It seems that she had accepted the God of Israel and was living according to Jewish customs. She was the person whom God had chosen and prepared to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. Luke writes, ***“The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”*** This shows that Lydia’s acceptance of the gospel was not something done by human effort but was the work of God. Paul delivered the message, but it was God who opened her heart to receive it. In verse 15, we see that Lydia, along with her household, accepted the gospel and were baptized. Through Lydia, the gospel was shared with her entire household. She invited Paul and his companions to stay at her house, saying: ***“If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.”*** Lydia understood that God does not show favoritism (Rom 2:11). She was a strong and courageous woman of faith. Women play a vital role in God’s mission. While men usually take visible leadership roles in the church, those deeply committed to Jesus are women believers. Many of our women believers are devoted prayer warriors, excellent Bible teachers, and dedicated servants. Our church is blessed with many great women of faith. I deeply respect them. I pray that more women of faith like Lydia will continue to rise up among us.

In this way, Lydia and her household became the first members of the church in Philippi. But who else joined the believers? Although the Bible does not explicitly say, I think that the female slave who was possessed by a spirit of divination may have been one of them. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. The problem was that she followed Paul’s mission team, shouting, ***“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”*** What she said was true because even demons recognize Jesus. Some might think that this female slave was actually helping Paul’s gospel ministry, so it wasn’t an issue. However, she kept doing this for many days. No matter how true the statement is, if it is repeated constantly, it becomes noise. Moreover, since it was spoken by an evil spirit, it was not constructive. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he cast out the demon. ***“In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!”*** At that moment, the spirit left her, and she was freed from the demon. The Bible doesn’t record whether she came to believe in Jesus or became a member of the church in Philippi afterward.

Another key figure of the Philippian church is the jailer. The jailer was guarding the prison where Paul and Silas were held. Seeing that the prison doors were open, the jailer assumed that all the prisoners had escaped. In despair, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. Under Roman law at that time, if prisoners escaped, the jailers had to face the punishment intended for those prisoners. The jailer believed that he was doomed and decided to take his own life. But Paul saw what was happening and shouted, ***“Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”*** Paul quickly intervened and stopped him. Paul valued the jailer’s life. Paul was willing to stay in prison to protect the life of the jailer.

Hearing Paul’s voice, the jailer called for lights and confirmed that all the prisoners were still there. He rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas, deeply recognizing that they were servants of God. He then brought them out and asked, ***“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*** Why did the jailer ask Paul and Silas this question? Although his physical life was spared, the jailer realized that he still lacked true salvation. Having come so close to death, he recognized his need for eternal life. Eternal life comes from God. It brings true peace and joy to the heart, transforming our lives to bear fruit for the glory of God. ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** This question is very important. If you haven’t yet received salvation through Jesus Christ, you should ask this very question: ***“What must I do to be saved?”***

Let’s read verse 31 together: ***“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’”*** We love this verse. The apostle Paul gave a very simple yet powerful response: ***“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”*** The way to salvation is indeed simple. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, when we believe in Jesus and confess Him as Lord, we are saved. Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to the jailer and all the others in his house, explaining the gospel to them in more detail. That same night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds. Then immediately, he and all his household were baptized. The jailer then brought Paul and Silas into his home and served them food. The jailer was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—along with his whole household. When we believe in Jesus, our hearts are filled with great joy. When we share the gospel, we don’t need many complicated theologies. While such theologies can help us understand the gospel better, they are not what ultimately lead us to salvation. When we simply share the message, ***“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,”*** the Holy Spirit works powerfully.

How did God establish the church of Jesus Christ in Philippi? God established His church by leading each person to salvation one by one. God can transform thousands at once through a sermon, as He did with Peter’s preaching. But He also accomplishes His gospel work by reaching individuals one by one, as He did in Philippi. Therefore, we must value each soul and continue to share the message of the gospel with shepherd hearts for each person. The person we are helping with God’s word right now could be Lydia or the jailer of this generation. We pray that God will bless our one-on-one Bible studies. We also pray that God will send us people like Lydia and the jailer.

***Third, we can participate in God’s mission by praying and praising with faith, even in the midst of trials.***

Paul and Silas faced great suffering in Philippi. The owners of the female slave seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They were wicked people who exploited a vulnerable individual for their own benefit. Cleverly, they accused Paul and Silas, saying that they were Jews and that they were causing trouble in their city. The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. Paul and Silas were severely flogged and then thrown into prison. They suffered great humiliation and pain while serving the Lord’s gospel work. How do you think Paul and Silas felt, locked up in the inner cell of the prison? They could have complained against God. They might have said, “God, didn’t you show us the vision of the man of Macedonia and send us to Philippi? Did You send us here just to suffer this pain and humiliation?”

When I was in Venezuela, I was once locked up in a detention center. They took my belt, removed my glasses, took my fingerprints, and photographed me. I was deeply embarrassed and shocked by this experience. As a self-supporting missionary, I also struggled with failures in business, which led me to complain to God: “God, did you call me as a self-supporting missionary to make me suffer?” Once, after receiving a threatening phone call, my family and I had to flee to the United States. On the way to the airport, I couldn’t hold back my tears. “God, I came to this land to share the gospel, but why am I facing threats to my life?” Many of us here have also come to the United States as self-supporting missionaries, serving the gospel ministry while enduring the challenges of life. At times, we may have felt complaints towards God. But I believe that God sees every tear and knows every struggle we endure. When Jesus Christ returns, He will wipe every tear from our eyes.

Paul and Silas did not complain to God even in the midst of such severe trials. Look at verse 25: ***“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”*** They prayed and sang hymns to God loudly, even at midnight. Imagine Paul and Silas praying and singing at the top of their voices instead of sleeping, and the other prisoners not complaining but instead listening to their prayers and hymns. Isn’t it fascinating? Perhaps some prisoners thought, “Who are these crazy guys?” I see Paul and Silas’s loud praying and singing as a spiritual struggle—a determination to continue trusting and relying on God to the end. Although they were in pain, physically weak, and exhausted, they decided to pray and sing loudly to God. In doing so, they kept their faith, and God was pleased with them. Suddenly, a violent earthquake occurred, shaking the foundations of the prison, opening all the doors, and loosening everyone’s chains. Later, Paul and Silas walked out of the prison, escorted by the magistrates. They then went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. God’s church grows through such trials. Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Rom 5:3-4). Therefore, we must intentionally pray and praise the Lord when we face any trials and sufferings.

I pray that we may actively participate in God’s mission with prayer, sharing the gospel with one person, and praising the Lord in the midst of trials. Amen.