

Session 6

October 7, 2018

GOING OUT

Acts 16:6-15

In His final words to His disciples, Jesus said, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19-20). His commission is *intentional*; the making of disciples won’t happen by accident. But His commission is also *imperative*. Nowhere does Scripture command the lost to go to church. Instead, the church is commanded to go to the lost! Hampered by resistance from the outside and apathy from the inside, many churches have become so self-centered that they are dying a slow death...and don’t even realize it.

In the focal passage, we see the missionaries (sent out by the church at Antioch) embarked on their second missionary journey. While fully involved in Great Commission work, they modeled some simple—but essential—principles for churches today.

They went (vv. 6-8). No doubt, there is a balance between keeping a congregation healthy and keeping it growing. Paul and Silas began the journey to strengthen the churches started by Paul and Barnabas earlier. Pastors and church leaders certainly have the obligation of feeding, securing, and maturing their flocks (see 1 Peter 5:2). But expanding the kingdom is just as important. Once the previous churches had been checked on, Paul and Silas picked up young Timothy who accompanied them into new territory. The principle of ministry both “here” as well as “there” is foundational to the Great Commission (see especially Acts 1:8). The most notable feature of these verses is the work of the Holy Spirit in directing them; not whether or not *to go*, but rather *where* to go! While not everyone is called to cross the oceans, all of us are called to at least cross the street! The lesson? Obedience to God’s call as well as a sensitivity to God’s leading are the keys to successful outreach.

They watched (vv. 9-12). Paul’s sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s leading was enhanced by a vision he had that night. While most of us are careful (or even skeptical) of visions and dreams today, we all would admit that God still speaks to us through His word and by His Spirit. In this case, God’s direction was dramatized clearly by a Macedonian pleading with them to come to their region and help. Three aspects of the story stand out. First, there was the right *activity*. Paul’s group was already “going” when they received God’s direction. As with the call of Abraham in Exodus 12, God tends to give clearer direction once His people are up and moving. Second, there was the right *attitude*. Paul concluded that God had called them to evangelize in Europe because that’s all Paul and his companions had been thinking about! Their entire journey after leaving the churches was focused on winning the lost. They were consumed with it. Third, there was the right *obedience*. The response of the missionaries was immediate (v. 10) and straight (v. 11). The lesson? When we are passionate about the gospel and actively engaged in God’s work, He will direct us to the right opportunities. We just need to watch for them.

They witnessed (vv. 13-15). So much church-talk today is focused on “building relationships.” While that is certainly important, we can let the means to an end *become* the end. The result? relationships that are *social* but not necessarily *spiritual*. Paul’s witness to Lydia is filled with practical principles for sharing the gospel. First, he took advantage of the spiritual atmosphere (v. 13). People already thinking about spiritual things are the most open to hearing spiritual truth.

Second, he sat down and spoke to the ladies gathered there (v. 13). While demonstrating a godly lifestyle is a part of one's testimony, there is no substitute for actually sharing the gospel! Romans 10:17 reminds us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Third, Paul allowed the Lord to do His work (v. 14). Fourth, Paul led Lydia and her husband to faith in Christ; a faith that resulted in public profession and baptism. Finally, Paul and his companions enriched this new relationship with fellowship (v. 15). The lesson? Church outreach doesn't just happen; it must be intentional.