

Series: You Are Sent Vol. 3 – “Planning to Go, Willing to stay”

Date: 6.27.2021

Text: Acts 16

Sermon: The gospel is for everyone, so let’s reach everyone

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Preparing for Fall ‘21 – Lots of new faces right now. We are not just a weekend service, one of our big things is we help people take their next step in following Jesus. That’s WHY we break our church down into these things we call community groups. It’s pockets of people who care for one another & love one another and help each other grow as followers of Jesus. So many have told us throughout these past 5 years that what makes Mercy feel like home is their community group. I believe that and feel that too. I know it’s true for me and my community group. But here’s the thing. Over the past 5 months as people have emerged from the pandemic, we’ve grown as a church. A LOT of you are newer to our church and we are so glad you are here. Over the course of this summer you are going to hear a number of opportunities because we believe God gifts every believer. And since we are in acts and it’s all about movement, I hope you will jump in. The first one though is we need 20 new community groups to launch on 8.22. We’ve got 7 new groups ready to go & we need 13 more. We are going to be doing some shoulder tapping but I’m also putting this out there so you can hear me say it. Let’s go. The time is now. Pray about it and email Cori little.

Ok, Got your bible, Acts 16. Today we are going to see Paul plant a church. He’s going to go into a city called Philippi and start a new church. And our author Luke is going to show us 3 totally different types of people that Paul encounters and how Paul ministers to each of them. And I think this is big because it shows what happens with the gospel truly moves into a city.

Paul doesn’t try to reach one specific segment of the city. For years’ church growth strategists said “pick a demographic...and go after them.

- Pick the Starbucks & Target crowd because they got money.
- Pick the microbrews & apartment crowd because they have influence.
- Pick the blue collar crowd because they are reliable.

But that’s not the new testament church. The new testament church brings the gospel to everyone. And the gospel brings healing to everyone. In fact, the main idea today is: **the gospel is for everyone, so we are sent to everyone.**

This is what I HOPE for Mercy Church. I hope we are a church where God’s mercy is for ALL people. And that we do the hard work. And ya’ll it is hard work. To *SEE* the needs of all people, and to try to reach people by ministering to their needs.

But this passage will also remind you that you are included in that everyone. So this should lead you to look with fresh,

thankful eyes on God's love for you.

[11] So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, [12] and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.

Now they went to Macedonia because Paul saw a vision of a Macedonian saying "come to Macedonia to help us." So off they went. The "we" indicates Luke is now traveling with Paul on these journeys. He's the medic.

[13] And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

What a cool note that the Lord starts his work in Philippi at a women's prayer meeting.

[14] One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a **seller of purple goods**, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. [15] And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

¹ Inserra, Dean. *Unsaved Christian* (___)

We know purple dye was a rare & valuable commodity. We know she owned her own home and own business. So we reason that Lydia was a pretty well off, well-respected businesswoman in town.

When it came to faith though, Lydia was worshipping a God she didn't fully understand. She was familiar with religion, seemed to believe in God, but didn't understand how she related to him. So Paul just preaches to Lydia the great news of the gospel. Which leads us to the first way the gospel reaches the whole city.

The gospel saves people who are familiar with God.

Lydia was familiar with prayer, familiar with some form of Jewish practice. That's why she's doing this sabbath practice thing. And maybe she's done it her whole life. She was religious by culture, but not by conviction. And I think this is one of the largest unrecognized mission fields in front of us. And the name for what it is TODAY is cultural Christianity.

*"Cultural Christianity is a religion that...is practiced by more Americans than any other faith or religion. Its participants can be found in Catholic or Protestant churches, in the South and Midwest, on high school football fields, at patriotic celebrations, and around family dinner tables. It looks and sounds very Christian on the surface, but is merely **Christian by culture, rather than conviction.** The gospel of Jesus Christ is not part of the equation."¹*

"It admires Jesus, but doesn't really think He is needed, except to "take the wheel" in a moment of crisis. The Jesus of Cultural Christianity is a type of historical imaginary friend with some magic powers for good luck and sentimentality. 'Amazing Grace' is a song known from memory, but why that grace is amazing cannot be explained."

Now the great danger to Lydia's is that the gospel sounds familiar so you can think "oh yeah I know that." And to you I offer

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'" Matt. 7:21-23

Do not assume just because you admire Jesus or because you did some good things that you will be saved. The gospel is not "didn't we" its "didn't he?"

Now here's the good news back in Acts 16.14

"The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul"

Those people who come to church year after year, who know the Sunday school stories and yet have never truly believed the gospel...GOD LOVES YOU!

See it does not say "Lydia finally figured it out." NO. It says the Lord opened her heart. And maybe the Lord has planned for you to be here today so he can open your heart! Salvation is his. Every part of it.

Here's the gospel. Listen Lydia.

- You are right, there is a God. He did create the world. He did create you. He does have a purpose for you. Those prayers you pray, there is a God on the other side of them.
- Sin – The problem with people familiar with religion is usually they don't realize their sin problem. Sin isn't just doing a bad thing. It separates you eternally from God the father. You are DEAD in your trespasses and sins.
- Jesus – He died in your place. That's the Gospel in 4 words.

Religion in 4 words: Be a good person

Gospel in 4 words: Jesus in my place

He died in your place and he rose again. And that's big because if you identify with his death for your sins...he says you get to identify with his resurrection as giving you new life. So if you are a cultural Christian, I pray you, like Lydia...would hear the true gospel today and believe it and receive it. Maybe God is opening your heart. That's what happens when it seems like you are the only person in the room and the preacher is just talking directly to you. That's not me. I don't

know your heart. God does. And he's working.

Church Lydia also represents the person who *will* accept your invitation to attend one of our Worship gatherings. Familiar enough with Christianity to come check it out. Maybe has been in a church before but stopped going. Which is why we are going to try and take really good care of our worship gatherings. That's why we care what happens in the parking lot, when you meet our first impression teams, that's why we care so much about our Mercy Kids Team, its why we think through every element of our service and why we try to preach in a way that makes sense to people where they are. We are a church community, not just a weekend gathering. But for the Lydia's in Charlotte, and there are many, this will be their front door to Mercy Church. And so we will plan for that.

BTW – see her first response? Baptism. **That is the response to belief.** But she doesn't stop there. She turns her home into a ministry center. "Once your heart is opened to God, your resources – your wallet, possessions, and home – are open as well."²

Maybe you are Lydia. And you need to be baptized. You need to get into ministry and on mission here. And we want to help you. Because you are who God is going to use to reach other Lydia's and the other two groups of people here.

² Keller, Acts, Lesson 16 pp4

The next two are going to represent a growing segment of our population. That is, the people who aren't as familiar with religious things.

But something about that rings true doesn't it? Will we be a church that just tries to connect with Lydia? Because we *could* do that. It will mean trying to get a slice of an ever-shrinking pie. OR, will we be a church for our entire community? We are going to see what that means for us in these next two encounters.

[16] As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. [17] She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." [18] And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

[19] But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

And he is deeply troubled by this girl. Where you read annoyed you can also read deeply troubled. This wasn't a quick tempered reaction by Paul. It built up over days. For

days he watched this slave girl, possessed by a demon, spew at them. Because the demon recognized the real deal. THOSE ARE THE MEN OF GOD! This wasn't praise though, it was fear. It was warning. The enemy is here.

Why put this story here? To show you the difference between these two women. "They differ so much from one another that [Luke] might be thought to have deliberately selected them in order to show how the saving name of Jesus proved its power in the lives of the most diverse types."³

Lydia is a respected business woman, a pillar of the community. The slave girl is scarcely a member of the community at all. Lydia is familiar with morality and religion. The slave girl is completely alienated from any moral sense of knowledge or truth. Lydia has accomplishments to be proud of, the slave girl is completely marginalized without a shred of dignity. Lydia's success has earned her some amount of power and independence; the slave girl is completely powerless. All this is to show, as one theologian said, that the gospel can address and transform absolutely any condition! The gospel is as much for moral and "nice" people as it is for broken and addicted people.⁴ SO NO MATTER WHICH ONE YOU ARE TODAY, or somewhere in between...The gospel is for you!!

³ Bruce, 332.

⁴ Keller, Tim. *Evangelism: Studies in the Book of Acts* (Redeemer Pres. Church 1997) Leader Guide Week 16 p5.

What happens? All at once God rescues her from her spiritual bondage & social bondage. See the impact of the gospel?

See the gospel saves the religious person. **The gospel brings healing & dignity to hurting people.**

We aren't told if this girl became a Christian. We are told she was healed. And she was healed by the power of God. **So Let's ask each other church. WHO ARE THE hurting? who are the poor & oppressed?** We believe The Gospel heals the brokenness of a city today just like it did for this new church. See this girl's owners showed her no dignity. But gospel says GOD created her. In his image. He loves her. Desires her. Sent Jesus FOR HER. A task in front of every church is to answer "who are these people among us?"

Here are just 3 pockets of people:

The Homeless

- Over 4700 students in char-meck school system homeless⁵
- 1 out every 5 homeless children in NC live within 8 miles of uptown

The Enslaved

⁵ Stats from urban ministry center & A Child's place. <http://www.charlottefive.com/8-sobering-stats-about-charlottes-homeless-problem/>

- The demon-possessed girl was a slave who was being exploited for the financial gain of her owners. Does that sound familiar? In case you've been living under a rock, the slave trade is alive and well in the shadows of 21st Century America.
 - The FBI ranks NC as one of the top 10 states for human trafficking and Charlotte is the #1 spot in NC for it.⁶
 - Mercy the gospel tells us we were slaves to sin. And then Jesus came and broke the chains of slavery. So we are free people now. No longer enslaved to the wicked master we once were. If you really believe that, your heart will ache for the slave girl and then you will act. Because you dear friend, if you've been set free, how can you not be an advocate for those in bondage.
- **The unborn**
- In 2019 28,450 abortions were performed in NC. And 38% of those were performed in Mecklenburg county.⁷

Homeless, Enslaved, Unborn. All at risk every day. ***And the church that believes the gospel must not sit idly by while the helpless suffer.***

⁶ Stats by Present Age Ministries in Harrisburg, NC. Accessed at <http://www.presentageministries.com/>

Imagine if the abortion clinics & orphanages shut down because churches were so willing to care for children that government funding for them became *unnecessary!*

This is why we gotta get past Covid Fog. Because sin didn't take a break during the pandemic. Sin still raged. Transparently I believe this is still where we have the farthest to go in our ministry as a church. I haven't led you super well here. Thankfully several of our members have led us well but we still have work to do to take the gospel to everyone.

And it was costly to Paul & Silas to heal that girl:

[20] And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. [21] They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." [22] The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. [23] And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. [24] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

So here are our good Samaritans Paul & Silas, thrown into prison for liberating a slave.

⁷ <https://lozierinstitute.org/abortion-reporting-north-carolina-2019/>

[25] About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

They were praying & singing. “break every chain.” That’s how they approached their injustice. So much to learn there isn’t there? When you are imprisoned unjustly, perhaps God is about to use you in some way you never saw coming. Instead we often think God has forgotten about us or we are angry yet he may be setting up something we couldn’t believe if he told us

[26] and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. [27] When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

Ok the Jailer: Jailers commonly were retired army veterans, who could be expected to follow orders and use their military skills as required.”⁸

The Jailer represents the segment of our community that seems far from God. Here’s why: He’s lived his whole life apart from Jesus, and for the most part things are going fine.

⁸ Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles”, 463-64.

Steve Timmis, in his book *Everyday Church*, cites a study in which 70% of British Citizens say they have no intention of ever attending a church service. For any reason. Not at Easter. Not for marriages. Not for funerals or Christmas Eve services. 70%! He says,

“That means new styles of worship will not reach them. Fresh expressions of church will not reach them.... Great first impressions will not reach them. Churches meeting in cool venues will not reach them... The vast majority of un-churched and de-churched people would not turn to the church, even if faced with difficult personal circumstances or in the event of national tragedies. It is not a question of ‘improving the product’ of church meetings and evangelistic events. It means reaching people apart from meetings and events.”⁹

We aren’t in London, and I do believe the religious landscape is different here. But still there are plenty of people who don’t think to ever GO to church. you know? At least not for a long time and not without some close friendships. How did Paul reach the Jailer?

When the jailer had a need, Paul stayed. The jailer didn’t ask for help. But Paul saw he needed it. Saw his fear.

⁹ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Mission by Being Good Neighbours* (Nottingham: IVP, 2011), 15.

[28] But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." [29] And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [31] And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

- The gospel gives revelation to the religious, gives rescue to the helpless, and..

The gospel saves people who are unfamiliar with God.

- This Jailer is so overwhelmed by the fact that Paul STAYED. Why? Paul deserved to walk out that door. Earthquake meant Justice is served. The righteous go free and the jailer gets what he gets. We would all celebrate that.
- But Paul has compassion on the man who had no compassion on him. Paul's pain and suffering became an opportunity for him to proclaim the hope and joy he had in Christ.
- He sees him about to kill himself and So PAUL sacrifices his freedom to save the Jailer's life. And the jailer who has been listening to that singing says "what must I do to be saved!? I want what you have and now I realize how much I need it!!
- And so Paul says simply Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the running theme of Acts. Believe! Believe!

- Some of you Christians are in prisons of pain, bad relationships, or other circumstances. And maybe like Paul you didn't deserve it. The question is, will you sing in the midst of your pain? Will you hold on to the joy of your salvation? Because I promise ears are listening. Ears otherwise uninterested. **What if God intends you to suffer well for the sake of the salvation of someone watching?**
 - Let me make a caveat here: I'm not talking about suffering abuse. If you are being abused...God is not calling you to stay in that. You are made in his image and he loves you and it's not your fault. Tell somebody. See yourself in the slave girl that God loved and set free from her bondage.
- These people are probably the ones you have names and faces for. They are walking through life totally oblivious to their need for a savior. But maybe God has put you in their way so that you can carry the gospel to them.

[33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

- The jailer cleansed the wounds he probably helped inflict. And then the man he was abusing baptizes him. Because when God saves you, you get baptized! It keeps coming up so I'm gonna keep saying it!

Conclusion:

Prayer of a Pharisee – “God thank you that I am neither a Woman, A slave, or a gentile.” No doubt Paul’s prayer for many years.

Look who the 3 people are God takes Paul to in planting the Philippian church. A woman, a slave, and a gentile. All encountered by a Jewish man who had found Jesus.

The point today: **the gospel is for everyone, so we are sent to everyone.** And it will take every single one of us actively looking and listening to the stories happening all around us. So that we can share the truth of the gospel, the rescue in the gospel, & the life-altering effects of the gospel to the people in our city.

Close in prayer
