

READY STEADY COME!

Acts 16:1-10

INTRODUCTION: EXPLODING CHURCH

Picking up our series looking through the Book of Acts called Exploding Church.

THE STORY SO FAR...IN 5 MINUTES!

1. Jesus' Ascent

- a. *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea & Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)*

2. Pentacost

- a. Disciples receive Holy Spirit - tongues of fire and talking in tongues
- b. Jews think they are drunk - Peter preaches to them the gospel
- c. 3000 believe
- d. *"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common." (Acts 2:42-43)*

3. Signs & Miracles

- a. Lots of miracles and signs (Peter heals crippled man at the temple gate)
- b. All this activity starts to attract the attention of the priests and Sanhedrin (jealous)
- c. Peter and John imprisoned along with other apostles a number of times but preaching, miracles and signs continue being performed and the gospel spreads as well as the jealousy of the priests and Sanhedrin.

4. Stephen

- a. *"A man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people" (Acts 6:8)*
- b. Priest and teachers of the law could not match his wisdom through the help of the Holy Spirit.
- c. Priests & teachers persuade men to lie about Stephen - to say he has been blaspheming against Moses and God.
- d. Stephen brought before the Sanhedrin: *"Are these charges true?" (Acts 7:1)*
- e. Stephen speaks to them from Abraham to Jesus - the Son of God
- f. *"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You will always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51)*
- g. Sanhedrin stone and kill Stephen.

5. Persecution

- a. *"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." (Acts 8:1)*
- b. Introduction of Saul
- c. *"Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison." (Acts 8:3)*

6. Phillip in Samaria

- a. Phillip went to Samaria and preached the gospel there - later joined by John and Peter.
- b. The Jews and Samaritans disliked one another
- c. Last time John and James were in Samaria, they asked Jesus if they could pray for fire from heaven to come and destroy the Samaritans.
- d. Now: praying for a different fire from heaven to come on the Samaritans - Holy Spirit!

7. Saul's Conversion

- a. On way to Damascus to destroy more Christians, Jesus appears to Saul.
- b. "Why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4)
- c. Saul left blind and goes onto to Damascus as Jesus told him.
- d. Ananias, a believer, is sent to Saul and prays for him. Saul's sight is restored.
- e. Saul begins to preach that Jesus is Son of God.
- f. Everyone is amazed by Saul's conversion. Jews begin to plot to kill him.

8. Gospel spreads to the Gentiles

- a. Jews were not allowed to eat with Gentiles - stumbling block for the spread of the gospel to the gentiles.
- b. Peter receives a dream from God saying that it was ok for him to eat with the Gentiles
- c. Peter goes and eats with a gentile called Cornellius, preaches the gospel and they are filled with the Holy Spirit - just like the Jews.
- d. Demonstrated that God was working to win the hearts of the Gentiles also:
- e. "God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." (Acts 11:18)

9. Barnabas and Saul's First Mission

- a. Church in Antioch had been established as a result of Stephen's stoning.
- b. Holy Spirit: "Set apart Barnabas & Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2)
- c. Church pray and fast together and send Barnabas and Saul off.
- d. Saul starts to be referred to as Paul (Roman equivalent of his Jewish name)
- e. They go to Cyprus and travel through Galatia - Iconium, Lystra and Derbe - many miraculous signs and wonders.

10. Stoning of Saul

- a. Lystra: following a miracle, people think Barnabas and Paul are gods and begin worshipping them. Barnabas and Paul tell them not to and preach the gospel.
- b. Some Jews arrive though and persuade some of the people to stone Paul.
- c. Thinking he s dead, they leave him outside the city. But he isn't dead.

11. Council of Jerusalem

- a. Paul and other apostles return to Jerusalem.
- b. Discuss the growth of the church particularly regarding the Gentiles.
- c. Issues between Jews/Gentiles causing a rift within the church.
- d. Circumcision - Jews think the Gentiles should be circumcised but Peter argues that it is not a means of salvation.
- e. The church write to Gentiles advising them to abstain from:
 - i. Food dedicated to idols
 - ii. Sexual immorality
 - iii. Eating meat from strangled animals
 - iv. Eating blood
- f. Letter sent out to the churches and strengthened and encouraged the church.

12. Paul's Second Mission

- a. Paul says to Barnabas:
- b. "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." (Acts 15:36)
- c. Paul and Barnabas have a disagreement on who should go with them on their second mission and so go separate ways.
- d. Barnabas to Cyprus with John Mark (West).
- e. Paul goes to Derbe, Lystra and Iconium with Silas (North).

This is where we will be picking up the story today.

READY, STEADY, COME!

READ ACTS 16:1-10

1. READY (v1-6)

Ready: *adj* in a suitable state for an activity, action, or situation; fully prepared.

1A. READY WITH A PURPOSE?

Ready for what? Surely you have to have know the purpose before you can be ready for it?

Back in Ch15, Paul says to Barnabas:

"Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing" Acts 15:36

The second mission was not intended to plant churches or take the gospel to the entire world - it's humble purpose in Paul's eyes was to meet up with the brothers Paul had met during his first mission with Barnabas. To help them out, to nurture them and offer guidance.

Paul was not concerned with simply increasing the numbers of followers, he wanted to win individuals for Christ - and every single person was important.

This is an example that demonstrates that Paul was much more than that - he had a key interest and concern in seeing churches and believers grow into maturity. Another demonstration is all of the letters we have in the NT - Paul wrote many letters to the churches he helped establish - maintaining contact with them for the purpose of enabling them to grow in their faith.

This was the purpose for the second mission and Paul was ready for it

2B. READY FOR OPPORTUNITIES?

Undoubtedly Paul knew that he would have opportunity to preach the message within the area again so those living in the area would hear the gospel and hopefully believe - adding to the numbers in the church. Something that is confirmed a little later on (16:5).

Another, perhaps unexpected opportunity arose whilst in Lystra.

Paul and Silas met a young disciple named Timothy. He was the son of a Jewess who was also a believer.

We're not told much about Timothy's father, only that he was a Greek. It is believed that Timothy's father had passed away (Greek - 'hyperchen - meaning 'was' imperfect tense).

Paul recognised the faith that lived within Timothy and seen how he had become well known within the area and was trusted by the believers. For this reason, Paul was keen to take Timothy along with him - to encourage him in his faith and use the gift that God had given him.

This chance opportunity meeting of Paul and Timothy was the start of a great lifelong relationship between the two men. Paul later refers to Timothy as his "Dear Son" (2 Tim 1:2) and the relationship was clearly reciprocated in Timothy looking to Paul as a father figure.

Paul was ready for opportunities that would come about in the mission.

1C. READY FOR PROBLEMS?

Mission has always involved problems - from the time of Abraham right through to today.

Those problems need to be considered and prayed through. Paul wanted to be ready for any problems that might arise.

Remember Paul's first mission, when in Lystra he was stoned by some of the Jews and people of the town. He was left for dead outside the city. But Paul survived.

So, when Paul came to plan his second mission, surely the stoning must have been on his mind! Perhaps those who intended on killing him the first time, would make sure they did it properly if he returned.

This however did not stop Paul returning to Lystra - he had good friends and fellow believers in the town who he wanted to see and build up in the faith.

We're not told what Paul did or didn't do to avoid the risk of being stoned again but I'm sure he was ready to address the problem if it came up.

Another problem was that Timothy was uncircumcised but Paul wanted to take Timothy on mission with him into areas where they would be preaching the gospel to Jews. Therefore, Paul takes Timothy to be circumcised.

In chapter 15, the issue of circumcision and salvation had been discussed by the Council at Jerusalem. Some were saying that if you were not circumcised accordingly to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (Act 15:1). However, Peter addressed the council and gave witness to the fact that God made no distinction between Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised. The council agreed with this and noted that the Gentiles do not have to be circumcised.

So why was Timothy circumcised?

Paul knew that this would have been a problem for the Jews because they knew that Timothy's father was a Greek. If Timothy had tried to preach the gospel to the Jews whilst uncircumcised, they would not have listened to him - their hearts and minds would have instantly turned off - although brought up a Jew by his mother before converting to Christianity, the Jews might have thought Timothy was denying his Jewish heritage by not being circumcised.

So, to avoid this becoming a problem Paul had Timothy circumcised.

Paul was a reed in the non-essentials, - an iron pillar in essentials
John Newton

Reed - flexible, soft and movable
Iron - Fixed, hard and firm.

So Paul, Silas and now Timothy travelled from town to town, delivering the guidelines for the Gentiles, which had been previously agreed by the Council at Jerusalem and preaching the gospel.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers
Act 16:5

This is one of five times that this phrase or similar is used in the Book of Acts by Luke, it's author. Luke uses the phrase to underline a change in the spread of the gospel - to mark the end of a period of growth.

Acts 1-6:7	Jews in Jerusalem
Acts 6:8-9:31	Hellenists and Samaritans (Peter & Phillip's Missions)
Acts 9:32-12:24	Gentiles and Antioch
Acts 12:25-16:5	Asia Minor (Paul's First Mission)
Acts 16:6-19:20	Europe (Paul's Second Mission)

The purpose of the mission had changed and Paul didn't know what the new purpose was or where they should go to - but he remained steady.

2. STEADY (v6-8)

Steady: adj 1. Firmly fixed, supported, or balanced. 2. Regular, even, and continuous n development, frequency or intensity.

Paul could have headed back home but he didn't - he wanted to press on in spreading the gospel... ..only he didn't know explicitly what God's plan was and so didn't really know where to go..

Rather than turn back for home, Paul and his team remained steadfast and kept moving around the area. It's interesting to see how God guided them in this time:

2A. KEEP MOVING

Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the boarder of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

Acts 16:6-8

Here it is on a map. Paul continued to move steadily through the region.

They set out from Antioch and tried to get into to Asia. Now Antioch is in the centre of the Phrygia region and was fairly close to the border with Asia. There was a main road called Via Sebaste which led to Colosse (150miles) and then onto Ephesus (another 150miles). It was therefore quite natural for Paul and his companions head in this direction.

For some reason, we're not told how, the Holy Spirit prevents them from entering Asia and preaching the word there and so they head northwards until they reach the boarder with Mysia.

They then tried to enter Bithynia to the north, but once again the "the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to."

Again, it is not known how the Holy Spirit prevented them from entering Bithynia. It could have been through giving the missionaries a strong internal feeling/impression or an outward issue such as illness or Jewish opposition (risk?). Silas, earlier in Acts, had been noted as having the gift of prophecy, perhaps he had received guidance from the Holy Spirit not to enter these places. We don't know.

What we do know is that, as the team had come from the east and God had prevented the heading both north into Bithynia and South into Asia, the only option left for them was to head West, through Mysia to Troas.

They must have been in a state of considerable perplexity, wondering what God's plan and purpose were, for so far their guidance had been almost entirely negative.

John Stott

Some might have stayed back in Antioch and waited for the Holy Spirit to lead them... not Paul, he had faith that God and the Holy Spirit would guide them. However, Paul remained steadfast and moved through the region - trying different borders, knocking on various doors - the answer had always been 'No' but they weren't defeated and kept on listening for God's guidance.

However, all of this time they kept on listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

2B. KEEP LISTENING

Finally, Paul and his team arrived in Troas - after almost 300miles.

Troas, was a seaport on the western coast of Mysia and was the chief port for the Roman Empire for trade and movement of goods from Europe to Asia.

Troas was seen as the gateway between Europe and Asia not only by the Roman Empire but also by the Holy Spirit...

*During the night Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."
Acts 16:9*

Finally, Paul had received a positive lead, finally he had received a message of "Come" rather than "Stay away".

A.T. Pierson, author of The Acts of the Holy Spirit, calls this the "double guidance of the Holy Spirit".

On one side, the Holy Spirit is saying "No - don't go there" but on the other hand He is saying, "Yes - come here."

It's a crucial element of listening to the Holy Spirit - not to just switch off once we've heard the "No" but to keep on listening for the "Yes".

This is something the Holy Spirit has done and keeps on doing:

David Livingstone: Tried to go to China but God opened the door to Africa.

William Carey: Tried for Polynesia but God opened the door to India.

Dan & Lucy: Wanted to go to India but God opened the door to Tajikistan.

Paul: aiming for Asia but God opened the door to Macedonia.

Form this we learn that God's guidance is not only negative but also positive - some doors close whilst others open.

3. COME (v9-10)

Come *verb* move or travel toward or into a place.

What was Paul's response when God opened the door to Macedonia?

3A. CAME TOGETHER

You can imagine Paul walking up the morning after seeing the vision of the Macedonian man - he would have been so excited to hear positive direction

from the Holy Spirit. Almost like a runner waiting to hear the bang of the start gun!

*After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.
Acts 16:10*

However, it's important to note the "concluding" part of the verse.

Paul did not simply get up and tell the party "I had a vision and God wants us to go there. Let's go!"

The original Greek word for 'Concluding' is *SYMBIBAZO* which means:
Being united, bringing together

Paul discussed the vision with his companions. Rather than it being a vision for the individual, it became a vision for the group, All of them thought and prayed into the vision collectively. Ans once they had done this, they came together united.

3B. ...AND ACTED

...we got ready at once...

Macedonia was the region on the opposite side of the Aegan Sea to Troas. Many boats would have been sailing between Troas and the Macedonia on a daily basis and so was easily accessible to Paul and his team.

*From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day onto Neapolis
Acts 16:11*

Samothrace was an island halfway between Troas and Neapolis where boats would settle for the night. Within two days of receiving the "Go" from the Holy Spirit - Paul and his companions had set their feet for the first time in Macedonia - part of the continent we now know as Europe...

CONCLUSION: EXPLODING CHURCH

So what was the effect of the Holy Spirit leading Paul and his three companions (Silas, Timothy and Luke) into Macedonia and what would come to be known as mainland Europe?

Well, without going into 2000 years of European history (!!!!!):

Europe	550, 911, 000	
25.63%		
Africa	482, 240, 000	
47.60%		
Americas	804, 140, 000	
85.99%		
Asia	278, 273, 000	
6.75%		
Oceania	25, 754, 000	
73.36%		
Globally	2.2billion	33%

This is all fantastic! Sometimes completely overwhelming.

But just as the growth of Christianity has continued to grow, so to has persecution.

Persecution: International Christian Concern (www.persecution.org)

Top 11 Countries Persecuting Christians:

Eritrea, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea, Somalia, India, Iraq, Vietnam, Nigeria, China, Egypt.

Globally

200, 000, 000

These numbers for both the growth and persecution can be overwhelming - but each number is an individual person - a son or daughter, a mother or father, a friend, work colleague or neighbour.

At the start of Acts, Jesus said:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea & Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

He said that to 11 men in a room in Jerusalem just over 2000 years ago. They took the gospel message to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

This morning we've looked at how Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke took the first step in bringing that message out of their region to the ends of the earth.

That was achieved through God's guidance and listening to the Holy Spirit.

Paul got ready and prepared the way for his second mission.

Once ready, he actively waited - moving around the region trying to find where God Wanted him to be. Listening for the Holy Spirit - often the answer being "No".

But then "Go" came - clear direction from God to go to Macedonia. Paul and his team reacted quickly and that path was opened to him.

READY, STEADY, COME!

Are you READY?

Preparing the way ahead, asking for purpose, looking opportunities and assessing the risks and what will be involved?

Are you STEADY?

Are you actively waiting on God? Knocking on doors around you to see if they will open? Are they closed to you? Are you pressing on even if the answer is "No"? Are you still listening for the Holy Spirit to guide you to the open door that God wants you to go through?

Then COME!

If you are ready and steady, then listen and you will hear "Come".

When you do, take action, praying and sharing the Holy Spirit's guidance with others, moving forward and acting on His guidance?