

The Beginning of Paul's European Odyssey

Text: Acts 16:1-12

When you read the title of today's message, what perhaps came to your mind was the Greek epic poem attributed to Homer describing the ten-year homeward wanderings of Odysseus after the fall of Troy. Troy is the ancient name of Troas, the place where the great apostle received his Macedonian call through a divinely orchestrated vision. This is the famed city of history, myth and legend, which was the place of inspiration for Homer's Iliad and Odyssey and Virgil's Aeneid. The ancient world perceived the writings of the Greek Homer and the Roman Virgil to be central in their philosophy and education, even as we do today. It has been noted by theologians and secular historians that Paul had been the leading proponent launching Christianity into the world. The word odyssey has come to be defined as a long series of adventures, especially when filled with notable experiences and hardships. The western world should be grateful for God's guidance that brought Paul our direction. For centuries, the western world has been the leader in exploration and economy. And right along with the west's exploration and education came the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We know there have been some blemishes from crusades and other misinterpretations of Christianity, but no one can deny that the teachings of Jesus and His followers have been beneficial in the areas of philanthropy and unparalleled altruism. And for those of us in the evangelical faith, we understand that the effect of Christianity has eternal ramifications in the saving of the soul and overall change for good in any person's life if they believe on the only begotten Son of God!

We come now to the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. It begins with the pairing of Paul and Silas. While the two missionaries were in Derbe and Lystra, Paul's most famous son in the faith, Timothy joined the team. Lastly, Luke, the physician and inspired scribe of the book of Acts and Gospel bearing his name enlisted into the enterprise. Together these four men are used by God to blaze a trail that has become a template for how to reach our world for Christ.

I. THE BLESSING OF A CHRISTIAN PARENT

Acts 16:1

II Timothy 1:5

Paul confesses that he, too, was influenced by his upbringing. II Timothy 1:3: "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day."

His mother and grandmother guided Timothy. II Timothy 1:5: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." Grandma Lois was mentioned first. This bespeaks of her fulfilling the admonition of Titus 2:3: "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things." It seems that Lois did well in instructing her daughter, Eunice to be the guide in her home. I Timothy 5:14: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none

occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” Timothy is the proverbial “proof in the pudding.”

Acts 16:1 tells us that Timothy’s mother was a believer but leaves us to surmise that his father was not a saved man. The Bible commands the believer not to marry an unbeliever. II Corinthians 6:14: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” We are not given details as to how Eunice and her husband met. Eunice may have become a Christian after she and her Greek husband were already married, which is often the case. On the other hand, her husband may have died soon after Timothy was born, therefore having the responsibility of rearing Timothy alone, with the help of her mother. Sometimes a person marries someone believing his or her spouse is in the faith and is surprised to find out that there is no root, therefore no fruit.

When a man or woman discovers their spouse is not converted, they are not given permission from Scripture to depart. I Corinthians 7:27: “Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.” I Corinthians 7:13: “And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.” There is always the hope and prayer that the unbelieving will convert as the believer lives the dedicated, consecrated Christian life. I Peter 3:1: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives.” It is only natural to be concerned that if you stay married to the unbeliever, that the children will be influenced to not believe or not be dedicated to Christ. The Bible teaches the opposite. I Corinthians 7:14: “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” The blessing of the Christian parent is that the holiness of the believer may counterbalance the evil influence of the unbeliever.

II. THE BOON OF A SURRENDERED LIFE

Acts 16:2,3

It was well and evidently widely reported that Timothy was sold out to God. Timothy possessed the best credentials a young man of God could have--integrity. I Timothy 5:22: “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.” Proverbs 22:1: “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.”

It is not enough to have the great and godly influence of a Lois or Eunice; we must own the faith and live the life.

III. THE BENEFIT OF DOING WHAT IS NECESSARY TO REACH THE LOST AND DISCIPLE THE BELIEVERS

Acts 16:3-4

Paul writes in Galatians 2:3, “But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.” Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. Paul was pointing out that this Gentile was not required, nor was anyone, to be circumcised to complete the act of justification, which was done by God through Jesus Christ in the act of salvation by grace through faith alone.

In the case of Timothy, Paul saw the benefit of having him circumcised so that he might have a hearing among the Jews. They knew his father was a Greek, but his mother, Eunice was a believing Jewess.

I Corinthians 9:20: "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law." I Corinthians 9:22: "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Acts 16:5: "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily." As a result of doing what was necessary, the churches were established in the faith; I love that they increased in numbers daily. When God becomes real in our life, we come to grips with the fact that Christianity is not just a Sunday morning, evening and Wednesday evening adventure – it becomes a daily opportunity to grow in grace and share our faith. These churches were following the pattern that had already been set as recorded in Acts 2:46, 47 and Acts 5:42.

IV. THE BIRTH OF THE EUROPEAN ODYSSEY

Acts 16:6-10

Once Paul and company had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, he had a strong desire to go deeper into Asia Minor, but the Holy Spirit forbade the team to venture into Asia to preach. They traveled further northeast and desired to go to Bithynia. Again the Spirit of the Lord would not permit them to go. So they passed by Mysia and came to Troas, the famed city of history and legend. It was here in this ancient city by the Aegean Sea that a vision at night came to Paul that literally changed the course of history. Acts 16:9, 10: "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." In Acts 16:10 it is important to observe that Luke's language changes from "they" to "we" and "us," making it apparent that Dr. Luke is now part of the team. And thus begins the odyssey into Europe and with that comes the Gospel and the Gospel changes everything.

The "Macedonian Call," has become an expression that describes the way many Christians personalize their own call to ministry. Patrick, born in the late 4th century was a Romanized British young man who was captured by a marauding band of Irish pirates and taken as a slave to Ireland. It was here that God arrested Patrick's attention while herding cattle on the isolated countryside. Patrick was in awe of God's natural revelation in the universe from the sky above him and the land around him. It was during this time that Patrick said he would pray up to one hundred times a day, seeking God. After recalling the basic teaching of the Christian faith in his youth, Patrick became a devout Christian and his captors noticed the change. Patrick began to understand the Irish people, their language and culture with an intuitive understanding that you learn only on the underside of that culture. Then Patrick began to love his captors and long for their reconciliation to God. By the providence of God, six years later, Patrick returned to England where he became a minister of the Gospel. The historian George Hunter said that Patrick, at age 48, "already past a man's life expectancy in the fifth century," had a dream, which proved to be his own version of a Macedonian Call. The Irish accent

pleaded, "We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us." And the rest is history. In my personal family history the "Macedonian Call," was ever before me as my father believed this was the way God led him into pastorates and Christian educational institutions and finally to India, Africa and the founding of Bible, Education and Missionary Service. By means of personal testimony, we have been able to pinpoint the Lord's leading Barbara and me to Houston over four decades ago with a type of "Macedonian Call."

Paul's call to the west is a great example of the way God leads us. Remember the three green lights in discovering the will of God that we teach from time-to-time. 1) Peace in prayer. 2) A word from the Word. 3) The open door of circumstances. There is one very important component in finding God's guidance and that is waiting. Haste can often lead to waste. Psalm 62:5: "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him."

-Pastor Pope-