

GLENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

August 23, 2020

The Call of Jesus to Tell Everyone Everywhere

Acts 16

Pastor Paul A. Jackson

[music: "Nothing is Holding Me Back"]

Brandon Dickson:

Good morning, you all. It's great to see you here this morning and get to be here to worship the God of the Bible who saves us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Big shout out to those of you who are joining us online; we're so happy to have you here. And to all those of us who are in person, we thank you for helping us out by keeping your masks on and practicing adequate physical distancing.

If you are interested in giving, we have a couple boxes out in the foyer for you to drop an envelope in, or you can visit our website to give online. Also wanted to let you know about an opportunity this fall to get connected to others, and the opportunity comes through our Life Group and a new form of small groups that we call Discipleship Groups. The body of Christ is called to be a network of supportive and truth-giving relationships, and each one of us, as members of that body, are called to be connected to each other. When we're connected to each other in relationship, we're able to transform others and be transformed ourselves. And we want to help you in that process. So, like I mentioned, those are through our life groups - we're launching new life groups this fall - and a new form of group called discipleship groups. We'll have more information for you in the upcoming weeks, but you can visit our website at glenwoodcc.org/discipleship to find out more and also to sign up for one of these groups. We'll have online groups and also in-person groups who practice the proper guidelines. So again, our website,

glenwoodcc.org/discipleship, to find out more. Now if you go ahead and bow your heads with me, let's pray.

Father God, we thank You for Your goodness, Your kindness, Your love towards us. We thank You for the salvation that is found through Your Son Jesus. As we worship You here today, draw us closer towards You. Remind us of how incredible that salvation is. And You call each one of us to go out and to bring others into Your kingdom to experience this salvation. Be with us here this morning. Let us give honor to You. In Your name. Amen.

Ben Rico:

Amen. Would you stand with us as we sing. We've been enjoying the book of Acts together, and there's such a strong call to action. And it's really a call to sharing the good news, the Gospel, that we are made alive and saved to God Himself in Christ. And it's a call of patience and really resilience as well, as we trust God that hurdles are for His glory and any praise that we receive goes to Him. Let us trust Him together as we cry out to the name of Jesus.

[music: "Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me"]

Amen, would you pray with me. Heavenly Father we thank you for setting us free. We praise you for releasing the chains that have bound us, what a miracle it is. help us to see that we have been freed to proclaim your name to proclaim you gospel. Help us to be effective ministers of praise to you in front of others so they might do the same, we believe in you and we call on your name, in Jesus name, Amen.

[music: "This I Believe (The Creed)"]

Do you believe? Amen. Please be seated.

Pastor Paul:

Good morning. It is great to have you here, thank you for joining us, those who are joining online. You guys are learning how to smile with your eyes. Thank you! We need to figure out how to become more expressive.

That was such an appropriate line that we just sang, "not I, but Christ in me." That is appropriate to every moment to every day if we're gonna do anything for God, we need Him, we need Him to work in us, we need him to work through us. And today, and days like today remind us that we desperately need God. This morning I watched the sun crest over the horizon, and it signaled a beautiful day, and you could see the blue of the sky, the clearness of the air. It's a reminder that God's grace and mercy is new every morning, and it's a reminder to us that the freshness of God's grace and mercy is accessible and available to us at every moment throughout the day. And so that we are reminded of our need for grace in the morning so that in the evening as we rest for the night we can be grateful for the grace and mercies of God during the day.

We've been going through a series in the book of Acts, and this morning if you would open your Bibles to Acts 16. We're actually going to start in chapter 15. This morning we look at a season in the life of the ministry of the apostle Paul when he is reminded of how desperate is his need for grace, how generous is God in giving grace--the kind of grace that saves through faith and the crucified risen Jesus of the Bible--and how God sustains and provides grace throughout. As we're gonna see in this, Acts 16, the second missionary journey that Paul experiences some deep, deep difficulties, a lot of trouble, but a lot of victory and joy in which he suffers for the cause of Jesus, and it ends up advancing the purpose of the Gospel of God. Acts 16 opens to a transition on Paul's ministry team: it's a personnel transition. And that transition in Acts 16, it follows two epic conflicts in chapter 15, the kind of conflicts that most of us would rather avoid if at all possible.

The first conflict, maybe, is an easier kind of conflict or battle to fight. It's a doctrinal conflict, it's a theological conflict, and it begins in the city of Antioch where

all of these Gentiles had come to know Jesus Christ, and so they're non-Jews, and so they come to know Christ. And the conflict is that there are Jewish believers who want Gentiles to become like the Jews in order to be saved. And so the conflict is expressed in Acts 15 verse 5, with these words: "*But some of the sect of the Pharisees who have believed stood up saying it is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them observe the law of Moses.*" So the conflict is over whether or not a Gentile who confessed Jesus Christ, a Gentile male, whether or not he has to be circumcised in order to truly know God. That's the conflict. It begins in Antioch, and it ends up in the nerve center of the Christian faith, in Jerusalem where the apostles are gonna weigh in on this issue and that is: just what do we need to do to be saved.

So there's this huge strong cultural press among Jewish people. I mean, you have the Old Testament. The Old Testament is God's world. We have the law of Moses. God is the one who told His people to circumcise Jewish males as a signature, as a sign that they are people of faith and that they're gonna try to live and obey the law of Moses that God gave to Moses. And so this comes from God, this is a big deal. And so Jews as a part of the practice of their worship of God, they would then circumcise the men. Now you've got all these men and women who are coming to Christ, so are you gonna make them absorb and live out the Old Testament and all of the Jewish culture says? So that's the question. And what the Jewish believers in Acts 15:5 this sect of the Pharisees, what they overlook is that circumcision is a sign of the Old Covenant and the Old Testament, and now God has sent his Son who lived out the Mosaic law perfectly, flawlessly. Because what the law shows us, is it shows us our sin, and it shows us our need for a Savior, so God in his grace--always been a God of grace--He sends his son to do what we have not done and cannot do, and that is to live out the law of Moses to fulfill the law of God perfectly, without sin. Then he dies, he's raised to life, new Covenant, you and I know God by faith in the crucified risen Jesus of the Bible.

And so there's this big argument that breaks out, it's a conflict in Jerusalem, and it's resolved with the words of Peter in verse 11. It says in chapter 15 verse 11, "*We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way*

as they also are." Who is the *we*? Peter is speaking for Jewish believers. Who is the *they*? He's speaking for new Gentile believers. Jewish Christians are saved the same way as Gentile Christians--through faith in Jesus Christ--with the result that this work, this act of circumcision is history, it is no longer requisite, it is no longer a signature of what it means or looks like to follow the Jesus Christ of the Bible. So the theological controversy is resolved through the apostles as they live out the new Covenant and the freedom that we have in Christ. So this is like a massive change in the culture and the traditions and the practices of Jewish believers. So we think circumcision is in the rearview mirror.

That brings us to the second conflict and this is the kind that most of us, it's painful for us to experience or to walk through. And that is that when we have partnered with somebody in a really great effort, such as representing Christ or doing things for God together, and we develop a friendship and a trust and a history, and we just have a long history with each other, and then we disagree, and we can't figure out how to resolve it, and then it gets emotional, it becomes really difficult and it leads to a separation, to a going different directions. So this dispute is one between Barnabas--who was the first person in Jerusalem to befriend Paul after he came to know Christ--so this dispute is between Barnabas and Paul. In a sense it's between Paul and his mentor, Barnabas. And the disagreement is over young John Mark, who on the first missionary journey he had left them when things got hard. They began the second missionary journey at the end of Acts 15, they're gonna retrace their route, they're gonna go back where they went before, and Barnabas wants to take John Mark. And Paul says "No," and it results in this big emotional disagreement and it gets so intense. Look at chapter 15 verse 39, "*There occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.*" And Paul, he takes Silas. So now you have two teams. It's an emotional split. It is one that is later reconciled and you see the footprints of the reconciliation through the rest of the New Testament stories, even to the end of the apostle Pauls' life, where you see they're all reconciled to each other and there is no harboring of sin or bitterness between the team that grew.

But they choose to go different directions, and so Paul and Silas, they launch then the second missionary journey and they begin to retrace their route to the churches that they had originally established. And the first place they went was the last place I would want to return to. It's the place where Paul was pummeled and stone by a mob. It's the city of Lystra. And so he returns to the church at Lystra, and there at the church at Lystra we find in second Timothy there are three believers: there is a woman named Lois, her daughter named Eunice, and the grandson named Timothy. They became followers of Jesus when Paul went through Lystra the first time, now we have five years has passed, and we come to Acts 16 and we read verses 1 and 2. "*Paul came also to Derby and to Lystra and a disciple there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer,*" that would be Eunice his mother, "but his father was a Greek. And he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium."

So young Timothy's dad was Greek, his mom was Jewish, which would then make Timothy considered by Jews, as Jewish. We know a little bit about Timothy. We know that he is young, that he had an outstanding resume, that he was highly regarded and respected by those who knew him well. Scholars think that he was probably in his late teens, just doing the math as you look at Paul's travels and Paul's letters that he later wrote to Timothy, I and II Timothy. And in those letters that Paul wrote he had personal words to Timothy, and we can tell a little bit about Timothy's character. We can see that he was a rather normal human being. That he had a great reputation, but like all of us he had certain deficits, certain weaknesses. It looks like he was given to shyness, or timidity. And so Paul has to exhort him that God has not given us a spirit of timidity, He's given us His own Spirit, a spirit of power. It looks like Timothy struggles with the same kinds of things any other young man struggles with. And so in II Timothy 2, the apostle says to Timothy, flee youthful desires, or youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness. It looks like Timothy feels the weight and pressure of his leadership responsibilities, and so Paul will later write to him "don't let anybody look down on your youth." Paul would later introduce Timothy when Timothy would take the lead and go and run an errand for Paul to Corinth, and Paul would write and say to the church of Corinth, "don't do anything that makes Timothy afraid of you." So I mean he's very clearly this young

guy, very clearly has these deficits, but he has this gifting. And God then calls Timothy, and Paul recruits Timothy to his team.

But there's a problem and that problem is going to be a hindrance. Paul's ministry strategy was to go first into the synagogue where he would find people who were followers of the Old Testament, the followers of the Jewish faith, the Jewish religion, apart from the New Covenant. And so Paul is going to go into the synagogue with the Gospel, and he wanted people to hear the Gospel. And the Gospel, he wanted to keep the Gospel the main thing. So when he went into the synagogue with this young guy who was considered Jewish, he didn't want to have to say "well he's not circumcised because of..." Instead they take this action in chapter 16 verse 3 that they had just said you don't have to do in chapter 15. *"So we see Paul wanted this man to go with him, and he took him and circumcised him." Why? "Because of the Jews that were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek."*

If I were Timothy, I could make a really compelling case that this is an unnecessary procedure--to say nothing being a difficult procedure. I don't know if you're like me, but I find it a lot easier to reason avoidance of discomfort than to find reasons that compel us to willfully volitionally experience discomfort. Timothy had every right to say, "I don't have to do this." They had just made that decision in Acts 15. But Paul could reason back, "You're right. You don't have to do this. But if you choose not to do this, when we go into the synagogue and talk with Jewish people who don't know Jesus, they're gonna want to know why a Jewish man didn't obey a clear command of God through Moses in the Old Testament. And what we want to talk about is God's salvation plan through grace in Jesus, we don't want to fight over this issue." On the other hand, Titus would later--Titus is a Gentile--and he would later become a member of Paul's ministry team, and he's not compelled to be circumcised because he's a Gentile. So Timothy chooses the procedure not for himself but for the good of others, and this is the important thing. Even as you wonder "why in the world are you talking about this so much"-- it's because he chooses this action of discomfort that is gonna cost him for the good of others, because now he has a clear voice and a platform for the Gospel of God. So together

they launch the first missionary journey. And in verses 4 and 5, they go through the region of the churches they had already visited, and the message they tell them is from Acts 15 in Jerusalem: salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, that he died so we don't have to, that he's raised from the dead to life with the result that the churches flourish and grow and add to their numbers.

So the second missionary journey is off to an incredible start. So they leave the churches that they had already planted, and they plan to go to Asia. That was Paul's desire. There was a thoroughfare up by the Black sea that went from Istanbul all the way east into Asia and China, and so they tried to head up there, because Paul wants to go to Asia. And they find that our plans are just our plans. That's what they are. So I can strategize, I can think, I can even pray about what to do next, and I can begin to take steps and actions about what to do next. So Paul, strategic thinker that he is, wanting to go places people have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he wants to go to Asia. And God says "No," closes the door. And then he has a second option, he tries to get north up to the Black Sea, and God says "No.: Twice. So how does he do that. Verse 6 and 7, *"They pass through the Phrygian and Galation region, having been forbidden by the Spirit the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia."* Now that is God's idea. Forbidden to speak the word of the Lord in Asia. Not yet. The Gospel would go to Asia. Interestingly enough it's the church at Antioch that would end up sending missionaries east, and they would make their way all the way east until eventually they would arrive in China. But now God says not yet. And then in verse 7, "after they came to Mysea, they were trying to go to Bithynia. and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them."

So they run into one closed door, they run into another closed door, and the only open door for them is to go west back onto the Meditteranean Sea to a seaport town, Troas. And now they don't know what to do. "What do we do, God? I mean, we thought we were doing what you wanted and you said "No," and so we decided to do plan B, and you said "No," so what's your plan?" God in His grace discloses his plan to Paul, Silas, and the team, in a vision in the night: we call it the Macedonian Call. Verse 9 and 10, *"A vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him saying 'Come over to Macedonia and*

help us.” So the guy is apparently wearing Macedonian garb, that’s modern day Greece, that’s Europe. The Gospel has never jumped a continent, gone to Europe, it’s fresh territory. So it’s this vision and there is this call, “would you come help us.” So what’s the help? How can you help us? Well, you can help us by presenting the Gospel of the crucified risen Jesus of the Bible.

So verse 10, *“When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them.”* So they jump aboard a ship, and they make their way to Macedonia, and they land and they go inland. They go inland to a place that is famous to us because it’s the name of one of Paul’s later epistles, the book of Philippians. They make their way to a Roman colony named Philippi. They come into Philippi and they’re looking for people to share the Gospel with. They’re looking for people who are seekers of the God of the Bible. And on the Sabbath, God leads them down to the riverside where, down by the riverside, they expect to find people who are praying. They do: it turns out to be a group of women who are praying together. And so the first sermon in Europe Paul delivers to a group of women.

And one of them becomes a signature responder, disciple, follower of Jesus Christ. So we pick up the account in verse 13, *“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.”* There it is. The response, verse 14, *“A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.”* I like the way that ends. “She prevailed upon us.” She insisted, and she wouldn’t give up. She kept offering her space and her house. There is so much said in so few words. God opened the door to Europe; God opened the door to Lydia’s heart; Lydia opened her heart to Jesus; then she opened her home to her new brother in Christ and his traveling companions. She was a business woman, worshipper of God, who sought God and discovered that God was already seeking her. And that’s how God works.

She gives Jesus her life, and when she gives him her life, she gives him all she is and all she has. She shares with generosity, hospitality. She has room in her house; she has space, lodging; she has the resource of food, and her house would become the nerve center, the place of gathering for the church in Philippi that now has begun with Lydia and her family coming to know Christ.

Lydia's the first woman that we meet in Europe in Acts 16. She's probably most likely from the upper class, but the next person Paul encounters or meets, that we meet anyway, is also a woman, but she's a poor slave who is possessed by a demon and exploited by her master. And her vocation is, she, for a small fee, tells the future, which provided an income for her owners. And Paul ends up confronting the demon that is in this woman, commanded the demon "come out." The demon obeyed, it did, the woman is healed and she's whole. Apparently she could no longer tell the future, or she refuses to work, or both, which resulted in lost business for the owners. It resulted in lost money, lost income.

And what follows is persecution of the name of Jesus, even though Paul and Silas are innocent of any charges. It's initiated by the marketplace. So it's the businesses that lost income that used their influence with the government to muscle Paul and Silas and minimize the message of Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly they had heard the message of Jesus but it didn't matter to them, so they falsely accused Paul and Silas before the local magistrate. What we read is in 19-21. *"When her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities, and when they brought them to the chief magistrates, they said 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which is'"*--listen to this--*"not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."* Not true. It is lawful, what they were doing. In fact, there is a lot that they don't know about Paul and Silas.

But the government agrees with the business owners, they know which side of their bread is buttered. And so what they do is they order severe consequences for Paul and Silas. And we read about that beginning in verse 22, *"The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and*

proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely." That's a key line. In the Bible there are no throw-away lines. So now these guys are accused of doing something illegal, hold onto that. And now they are stripped and they are severely beaten, they are beaten so badly that later somebody would need to bathe and bandage their wounds. So they are beaten badly, and they are thrown in jail. And they're thrown into the inner part, the deepest recesses of their jail, and the jailer, the head guy, receives specific instructions from his government bosses to guard him securely. That's the order, that's the command. So verse 24, *"Having received such a command, he threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks."* So the jailer does exactly what he was instructed to do, and so it's now night time.

What do you do at night? What do you think when life has gotten really difficult and the unexpected has happened and now you're in your own echo chamber and-- Your feet, imagine being limited, your movement, you can't stretch, you can't get up and walk around, and you hurt all over. I would probably be tempted to sing some song about "why me?" You know, maybe it would even be a country Western song, "somebody done me wrong" song. That's not what they do, what they do is something that I know so many of you also do, something that I do. You pray. You pray because you know you need God. You pray because you know God is good. You pray because you know God accepts you into his presence in and through His Son Jesus Christ. You pray because it's "not I, but Christ in me." And so you talk to God, you talk to Jesus, and you sing. You sing truth about who God is and truth about who we are. They're singing hymns. It's common for me in the week that follows the worship service, I keep hearing the worship songs just course through my mind at just random times of the day. Sometimes I'll awake early in the morning, and the first thoughts is that I think of a hymn. And I always hear the hymn, or most of the time, in the voice of my Mother whom, every night, she would play the piano and she would sing, and I can hear her voice. And so you sing.

And there is something so powerful about prayer and singing that restores the mind, restores the heart, so that Paul and Silas, they're singing together, and in the

midst of the dark dark, they're able to rejoice. And then God shows up and He shows His power in an unmistakable way that everybody can see. So in 25, *"About midnight, Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns of praise to God. And the prisoners were listening to them."* So everybody hears the song. Everybody hears the songs about Jesus. Everybody wonders why these guys, here in the other room, their feet locked up, they're under restraint, great discomfort, why are these guys singing? Why are they so happy? And so everybody's listening to them.

Verse 26, *"Suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened."* Boom. Everything's open. I can go. Let's get out of here. Let's hit the road. Let's go while we can. Let's sneak out under cover-- no no no. What is so remarkable about this is that everybody stays. The jailer doesn't know that, what he does know is that he's been commanded to keep them securely and guarded securely and know he's had an epic failure, a job failure. And so now he's gonna be held accountable for it, he's gonna be shamed for his failures. It's gonna be public, his whole family is gonna be ashamed. And so he takes out his weapon and he begins this drastic action to take his life, but Paul interrupts and he says "Don't do that! Don't do that! We're all here." Not just Paul and Silas, everybody, all those people who were listening to their voice. The voice of the Gospel sung in the dark of the night. We pick up the account in verse 27, *"When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice saying, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!' And he called for the lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas."* And he asked the best question anybody could ever ask. *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

What must I do to be saved? Well, perhaps he had heard Paul and Silas singing the Gospel. Perhaps he had heard them in the city of Philippi as they publicly announced and shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps he already knew that they had this message, but in any case asked this great, this pressing, most important question: what must I do to be saved? And Paul answers and he shares

Jesus Christ with the jailer and all of his family, and the family comes to Christ, the jailer comes to Christ. First the jailer comes to Christ, then he bathes their wounds. Then he is baptized in the middle of the night. So we see the account, as we pick up in verse 31 the answer, they say to the jailer, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."* And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in the house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household and he brought them into his house and set food before them and rejoiced greatly having believed in God with his whole household." That's a big night. A lot happened that one night.

Morning comes. Magistrates send messengers, send police officers to the jail, "Release these men. Let them go." Paul says, "No, we're not going. We're not going, we're staying here. We're not leaving until the magistrates come." They have accused Paul and Silas of doing wrong, and Paul is going to show them he did nothing wrong, that he did not break the law: that Paul and Silas didn't break the law, rather, the magistrates broke the law. So he's not gonna sneak out of town after a long hard night; he's not gonna leave the church in a lurch; he's instead going to proclaim publicly his innocence and, in proclaiming his innocence, people are going to see the illegal nature and the wrongness of the magistrates. 37 to 39, *"Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown into prison; and now they are sending us away secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and bring us out.'* And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city."

Why didn't Paul assert his rights as a Roman citizen when he was wrongfully arrested, wrongfully beaten, and wrongfully imprisoned? Why? Why does he wait until now? Why was he willing to go to jail even though he was innocent of wrongdoing? Why was he willing to forgo his rights of Roman citizenship? Well clearly he was led by God to keep quiet for now, to continue to proclaim Christ in prison. He had an opportunity that God used to win a whole family to Christ. Why

speak up now, though? He didn't speak up before, why speak up now? Well, now he uses his power as a Roman citizen to cover the jailer, to cover the new church--the church isn't founded by a common criminal--it keeps the focus of the new church on Christ and on the Gospel, and it gives the new church room, space, and time to grow without the magistrates continuing to hound this brand new church. So when Paul's innocence is publicly affirmed, then he leaves jail and we see the end of this account in verse 40, *"They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed."*

This account is a pattern that we see repeated throughout Paul's entire life. We see it throughout the book of Acts. The book of Acts ends when Paul is in jail, he's in prisoned again. And he's imprisoned in Rome, and from prison in Rome he writes a bunch of letters. They're called prison epistles, because though he's in prison, the Gospel's not in prison; he continues to announce the Gospel through whatever means is possible. So we have a pattern that emerges, that we have the same motives for the same pattern as did the apostle Paul. So we live two thousand years later: we have different culture, we have different practices, but we have the same Jesus. We have the same word of God and we have the same incentive, the same motive, the same rationale to drive our actions in a society, in a culture that needs to know Jesus Christ. Turn with me, if you will, to I Corinthians 9 where we see Paul expressing those motives in a very dense, summary, full of theological, biblical, practical ramifications in I Corinthians 9 verses 19-25. We see why Paul circumcised Timothy, why Paul restrained his rights, why Paul allowed himself to be pummeled or to be beaten. And his motives are explained in 1 Corinthians 9:19-25. Paul explains that he knows who he is. That he is a free man; he is a child of God; he has faith in Christ; he's gonna travel through different cultures and different places, people with different backgrounds; he's gonna present Christ. And his motives are revealed in these verses. How to use our freedom in Christ. Well there are three ways, three quick takeaways, that we see in the book of Acts, Acts 16, we see throughout the life and ministry of the apostle Paul.

But there are three takeaways about the apostle Paul that explain why he did what he did in that moment. Why in Acts 15: no circumcision. Why in Acts 16:

circumcised. Here's why. Verse 19-25 *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews, I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law, as under law, though not being myself under the law, so that I might win those who are under the law."* That's why he circumcised Timothy. So he goes into the marketplace, we're gonna see next week, he goes into Athens, to a bunch of pagan philosophers, and he walks right into their culture, and he speaks their language. He speaks as an academic who has studied philosophy; he knows who they are; and he's able to engage them on their level. And so now in Athens he acts completely differently than he does whenever he goes into a synagogue and he takes out the Old Testament and he says, "look, the Jesus that you're looking for is fulfilled here in the Old Testament." He does it a different way in Athens: same Jesus, same Gospel, different experience. So he goes into a Gentile area and: same Gospel. And he goes into a Jewish area: same Gospel. Verse 21, *"To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ."* And so here there's a lot, too much for us to go through. But he considers himself like we are, under this law of freedom: and that is that our hearts would be constrained by the love of Christ.

And he explains what that looks like in the next verses. "To the weak," in verse 22, *"I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the Gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."* That's what it looks like to be constrained by the love of Christ. Verse 24, *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the price? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable wreath."* So what he says is this. To the Jews, like Timothy, he's gonna have him circumcised so that he can proclaim Christ in the synagogues. To the Gentiles, like Titus, he's gonna say, "you don't have to do that." They're gonna go into a Gentile audience. So you have two different actions but from the same motive, and that is constrained by the law of Christ, constrained by the Gospel of God. And then he said this is really hard. This is really hard and it's gonna feel really long. And it's gonna take self-control;

it's gonna take discipline; it's gonna take us managing our impulses. So he pulls from the world of first century athletics, to the world of discipline and repetition, and doing what--maybe you don't want to work out today but you go ahead and work out. And he pulls from that world, and he said "Keep going, because it'll be worth it when you're with Christ."

So here are three quick take-aways for us as we close our passage this morning.

First, Paul was willing to adapt his practices to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So he was willing to adapt. He was flexible and inflexible at the same time. He was inflexible on the Gospel; he was flexible on the form of his communication and on how he messaged Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Paul filtered every action through Jesus Christ and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, every action. So he filtered his action in not telling the magistrate about his Roman citizenship and then later he tells the magistrate, "you've just broken the law," and now that emboldens the church and gives the church space to grow. But he filters every thought about what he's going to do through the Gospel of God. And in that way he participates, in verse 23, in the Gospel of God, in that God gave us what we don't deserve: to transform our heart so that we can give the good of the Gospel and message Christ and have credibility and a platform of communication to others and represent Christ truly.

Thirdly, Paul was determined to run the race for Jesus until he is the presence of Jesus. He's willing to deny himself for the good of others today, to make that a daily focus, a lifestyle, a lifestyle of today and tomorrow and every day stacked upon each other until he perseveres, until the race is done. Because today is just today. When we're in the presence of Christ, that's forever. At the end of the race, we receive a wreath that is not perishable, a crown that is eternal. So today let's give ourselves for the Gospel and the true good of others, and when we finally cross the finish line, and the presence of Christ, our crown is eternal.

Bow with me please.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your grace, that is fresh and new this morning, and will be fresh and new tonight. Thank you for the confidence and the hope that we have in who you are, that you are good that you are sovereign, that you work in this world, that you're not surprised by anything. Thank you for drawing us to you for opening our eyes, our ears, our heart, to your Gospel. Help those who don't yet know you to seek you, to confess faith in your Son that you sent to die, to be raised so that we can be forgiven forever, and love you in this place right now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ben Rico:

Amen. Would you stand with us as we celebrate that the Gospel knows no bounds, and we can recognize that in our own lives as we have been freed in Christ to live for Him and not search after things that we think will bring ourselves life. Let us commit to spreading His Gospel, His power, through the Holy Spirit to all creatures so that everyone might sing His praise.

[music: "All Creatures of Our God and King"]