

Acts 16

This is an action packed chapter and we'll take a brief overview of the various stories within.

Acts 16v1-5

Timothy - mixed race, Jewish mother, Greek father. Many Jews would not recognise the offspring and so for Paul to welcome him to his travelling party would have been huge. OK, Timothy was circumcised by Paul the Jew to show his Jewishness but this whole story is one of welcome and acceptance.

Acts 16v6-10

Here we have the calling of Paul to Europe. A significant moment in the history of the church. Notice how Paul wanted to keep in step with the Spirit. And when the call came in a dream, the response was immediate.

Acts 16v11-15

Note that the text says "We travelled..." Luke has clearly joined the team and so we get first hand information for the next part of the missionary journey. And now we're into Roman territory. It seems that Philippi had no synagogue for the Jews so, as was their custom, they would meet in the open by rivers.

Paul expected to find a place of (Jewish) prayer there and when he did Lydia of Thyatira responded to the message and became a believer. Indeed, she is the first European believer! She was a woman of great wealth. Dealers in purple cloth used a dye from a shellfish and £150 would only buy enough dye for one ball of wool.

After being baptised she welcomed the team into her home.

Acts 16v16-21

By comparison to Lydia, we meet an unnamed slave girl who was owned by traffickers who made money from her exploits in foretelling the future. After days of calling out "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved" Paul became so annoyed that he commanded the spirit to leave.

Seeing their means of income vanish, her owners attacked Paul and Silas and they were thrown into prison.

Acts 16v22-34

Even in prison Paul and Silas were able to sing praises to God. Despite the pains of their beatings there was peace. Even the other prisoners listened.

Then came the earthquake. Maybe not a surprise as the area was given to earthquakes, but the timeliness was perfect. Here was an honourable middle-class Roman Civil Servant, just doing his job and willing to face the consequence of prisoners escaping. And Paul took the opportunity to preach the gospel to the jailer and bring him from death to eternal life.

We know his conversion was true because he welcomed Paul and Silas into his own home, provided first aid for the wounds from the beating, and provided food for them. In fact, so profound was his change that his whole household believed.

Acts 16v35-40

The chapter concludes with Paul and Silas acting with great dignity. "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." He claimed his rights as a Roman citizen. To scourge a Roman citizen was a crime punishable by death. But Paul was not standing on his dignity for his own sake but for the sake of the Christians he was leaving behind in Philippi. He wanted it to be seen that they were not without influential friends.

And so Paul and Silas return to Lydia's house before moving on.

In this chapter we have seen God's welcome of mixed race, an affluent business woman, a slave girl, a middle-class civil servant and the dignity of Christian workers. We have seen the dynamic change of people as they come to faith and the opposition from those who don't like the message.

God hasn't changed so we can have confidence as we listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to us through scripture, dreams, words of prophecy and other Christians that God will lead us to places where we can serve him.

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