

Closed Doors and Open Hearts **Acts 15:36-16:19**

Making Progress

Three things happen in this passage that are confusing. But in the confusion, God was at work to keep the good news of Jesus spreading.

Painful Divisions

The church had just avoided a nasty split, and now Paul and Barnabas walk straight into one. The fact that Luke tells us about this, tells us that he is a truthful writer. We can trust him.

The argument was caused by Barnabas wanting to take Mark with them on the next mission trip. Paul disagreed: Mark had early deserted them. We can learn four things from this:

- We are not told who was right or wrong. This should keep us humble when we are in disagreement with good people.
- Two ministry teams develop out of one: God continues use people like us, despite our many faults.
- Even good and great men like Barnabas and Paul are not Jesus. He's the one we should put our ultimate trust in, not leaders who have feet of clay.
- It reminds us of the power of the gospel to restore people: Mark was restored by Barnabas and became extremely fruitful for Jesus.

Why would Barnabas not desert a young man who had deserted him? Because he understood the gospel: that God is merciful to people like us, to give us a second chance; and we should be as well.

All things to All People

Timothy was probably converted, not through Paul's preaching, but through the witness of his mother and grandmother. That should encourage all of us who are mums. What you do is not meaningless.

But why does Paul circumcise Timothy? So that more doors of ministry are opened, and more people get saved.

The Leading of the Spirit

Paul's team seemed to be blocked by the Spirit in everything they wanted to do. Sometimes life is like that. It seems all we get is closed doors. But God was positioning Paul for where he wanted him, and he does the same with us.

Changing Lives

In Philippi the gospel impacts the lives of two very different gentile women. Lydia was a respected business woman, but even she needed the gospel: and the Lord opened her heart. That should encourage us to pray for people we know who are like her. The slave girl was at the other end of the social spectrum. She was being used and manipulated, and Christ set her free. The gospel is very different from the fear and misery that her owners traded on.

When we understand the gospel, our own fears will flee, and like Paul, we'll do everything we can, in every way we can, to see that gospel spread to the respectable and the abused alike.