

## Journey 2: Lessons Learned from Missions

Acts 18:1–23

*Studies in Acts #23*

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**P**aul now leaves Athens behind and arrives in Corinth (v. 1). There he ends up spending a year-and-a-half (vv. 1–17). Then he returns to the province of **Syria** by sailboat (v. 18), which stopped in Ephesus (vv. 18–21) and where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila (vv. 18–19). They **asked him to stay for a longer period**, but **he declined**, saying, “**I will return to you if God wills**” (v. 20). He ends up back there in God’s will in chapter 19 in his third missionary journey! Finally he **landed at Caesarea**, **greeted the church** there (v. 22), and took the land route to his sending church in Antioch where he **spen[t] some time** (v. 23), before setting off on his third missionary journey back **through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples** (v. 23).

I want to take chapters 16–18 together and ask what did Paul learn on his second missionary journey? What can we learn about God, the unbelieving world, and our participation in the ministry of reconciliation?

### **Paul Learned that Hindrances Serve to Spread the Gospel**

First, *Paul learned that hindrances serve to spread the Gospel*. There’s a sign nearby on a road I’ve taken before that says, “No through traffic. Residents only.” How would you view that kind of sign? Is it a dead end? Is it a hindrance to your trip? Or do you view it as an opportunity to take a new path? We have to learn from the Word of God that bumps

in the road, hindrances, detours, and outright persecution are opportunities for God to use to spread his Word through us. Paul has learned that throughout his journeys.

*We saw it in chapter 16.* Paul wanted to travel a certain path throughout Asia Minor. But the Holy Spirit wanted him to go another route, and so hindered and forbade Paul from his path. So Paul had to change his plans. What was the result? He ended up in preaching the Gospel to the Macedonians.

*We also saw in chapter 16* that Paul had to endure unjust beatings and imprisonment because he cast out a demon from a fortune-telling slave girl. But what was the result? This led to the salvation of the Philippian jailer and his household. He never may have heard the Gospel unless Paul had been persecuted unjustly!

*We saw in chapter 17* that there was the riot in Thessalonica that led him to flee by night to bring the Gospel to Berea. Then there was his fleeing from Berea to Athens to spread the Gospel there. And his disappointment in ministry to preach a phenomenal sermon in Athena at the philosophical leadership on Mars Hill only to receive a lukewarm reception, led him to go to Corinth.

It doesn't matter what the hindrance is, can you say by faith, with Paul, that even though he "suffer[ed], bound with chains as a criminal...the word of God is not bound!"  
(2 Tim. 2:9)

## **Paul Learned that Election is the Reason to Preach**

The second lesson is that *Paul learned that election is the reason to preach.* This may seem contradictory to you. This may seem counter-intuitive to you. You may have

heard the opposite. But Paul's journey teaches this. Let me give you an illustration. If you've ever gone fishing (which I have not done a lot of, admittedly) you know that the majority of the fish in the water are not going to bite. There's a big lake or lagoon. It's filled with fish. But you that you are not going to catch them all. Does this stop you from fishing? No. It's because there are so many fish and even knowing that you'll only catch a few that you throw out the line to get them.

Look at this in verses 9–11 here: **And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.** So notice that there is a huge city in front of him, Corinth. And then notice God's promise and then Paul's response. First, God promises, **“I have many in this city who are my people.”** And that's why the Lord said **“I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you.”** We saw this promise earlier in 13:48 where we read, “And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” Second, God responds by staying and teaching for a year-and-a-half. As we saw in chapter 17, he exerted himself in bringing the word to as many people as possible. In one of our confessions of the faith called the Canons of Dort, we read that “it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, **ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people**, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel” (2.5).

## **Paul Learned that God's Strength is Found in our Weakness**

Third, in his missionary journeys *Paul learned that God's strength is found in our weakness*. We see this principle taught throughout these chapters. And Paul expresses it most clearly in two places in his letters to the Corinthians.

First, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 2:1–5. After telling them that while the Jews wanted signs and the Greeks wisdom we preach Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God, he says this:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Why did he come to Corinth in weakness and fear and trembling and simple words? He learned from his being run out of town in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea as well as in his most well-crafted message in Athens yet its lukewarm reception. And so when he arrived in Corinth he had learned that God's strength was found in his weakness. God didn't need him!

Second, turn with me to 2 Corinthians 12:1–10:

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears

from me. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.