

World Wide Witness: God's Mission

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[0 : 00] of Figra and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Maida, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Maida and went down to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia standing and begging him, come over to Macedonia and help us.

After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. From Troas, we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrath and next on to Neapolis.

From there, we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city of that district of Macedonia, and we stayed there for several days. On the Sabbath, we went out to the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Pyrotera, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to our home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house. And she persuaded us.

[1 : 33] Once we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.

The girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved. She kept this up for many days.

Finally, Paul became so troubled that he turned round and said to the spirit, In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her. At that moment, the spirit left her.

When the owners of the slave girl realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

They brought them before the magistrates and said, These men are Jews and are throwing our city in an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.

[2 : 33] The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake, and the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once, all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains became loose.

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, Don't harm yourself!

We are all here!

The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

[3 : 40] They replied, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and all the others in his house.

At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds. Then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them.

He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God, he and his whole family. When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order, Release those men!

The jailer told Paul, The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace. But Paul said to the officers, They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison.

And now, do they want us to get rid of us quietly? No, let them come themselves and escort us out. The officers reported this to the magistrates, And when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.

[4 : 48] They came to appease them and escorted them out from the prison, Requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, They went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them.

Then they left. Well, thanks Alex and Louise for reading.

Please have your Bibles open there. Follow along. Take notes. And if you have questions afterwards, or anything you'd like to discuss or think through about this passage, Or indeed anything else, Please do that with me afterwards.

Well, we're going to ask for God's help, As we try and see how these incredible stories, True stories, Shape our lives today. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Father, We ask that you would open our minds to understand your word.

[6 : 00] Open up our hearts, That we might receive from you all that you have to say. And we pray for the help of your Holy Spirit, That he would breathe life into these words.

So that they change us individually, And change us together as a church family. So we ask for your help in this.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, how great is God?

70% of the world's population, That's 4.9 billion people, Live in areas of the world, Where their governments and their leaders, Restrict and oppose, The moving out of the gospel.

So for example, If you lived in North Korea today, And you were caught by the authorities, With a Bible in your possession, Or even within your home, You and three generations of your family, So that's you and possibly your children, And your parents, Would all be sent to a concentration camp.

[7 : 25] It's estimated that there are 70,000 Christians, In that country alone, Living in such conditions. Or if you lived in Pakistan, Or in parts of India, And you were to share, Jesus with your neighbour, You could be run out, Or burnt out of your home, And you would almost certainly lose your job.

But let's bring it a little bit closer to home. Ireland, Ireland, Which doesn't restrict religious freedom, We have liberty to talk about Jesus. Well, Ireland still remains one of the most unreached countries in Europe.

So here is my question for us all this morning. How great is God to break down these barriers and obstacles, So that the good news of Christ reaches the 70% enclosed countries, And the country of Ireland.

But let me make it more personal than that. Who do you know, And picture them now in your minds, Who do you know within the circle of your friends and family, That has not yet turned to Christ?

How great is God to open their hearts, So that they come to faith in Christ? Or maybe you're not yet a believer yourself, And you're always wondering and questions, Well, how great is God to open your hearts, To come to faith?

[9 : 12] You see, it's very easy for us to become cynical and discouraged. We don't hear too much of people coming to faith in Christ, Certainly not in big numbers.

And so we begin to question and we doubt God's ability to save. Well, Acts 16 is a tonic of encouragement, Because it reminds us that God is great, And that God continues to open doors in amazing and incredible ways, So that his mission and the name of Christ goes on.

So we're going to look at a few things here that shows us that. First of all, God directs his mission. Verse 6, Chapter 16.

Paul and his companions, At this stage it's a team, Which includes Silas, A young guy called Timothy, Who they've picked up, And Luke, Who is the author of Acts.

So these four together in a team. They've travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia. Well, why did they decide to go to those places?

[10 : 27] Well, we're told, read on. They've been kept by the Holy Spirit From preaching the word in the province of Asia. Now a map will help us here.

There we are, on the screen. Paul has been travelling from Antioch. That's been his local church. He's been sent out from there. And in Phrygia and Galatia, He's seen lots of new churches planted. People have come to faith. They've joined together and churches have started. And as he's moved on from there, He's thinking, right, where to next? And they try to go to Asia. But they've been stopped from bringing the good news.

The Spirit won't allow them. Now it would make sense if we read something like this, That the local authorities wouldn't allow them to go through. Or if the river had flooded and the road wasn't accessible.

We could kind of understand that. But when it says so clearly that the Holy Spirit Wouldn't allow them to go into Asia, We're kind of boggled by that. Verse 7.

[11 : 33] So when they came to the border of Mycenae, They tried to enter Bithynia, Which was kind of up in the northeast. But the Spirit of Jesus Would not allow them to.

So they passed by Mycenae, And they went on down to Troas. It really is quite strange, isn't it? Because at the beginning of Acts, We read about Jesus who promised the Holy Spirit to come, Who would enable them to bring the good news of people To new people, And to new places, And he was going to open up doors to do that.

But now it seems he's blocking And frustrating their every move. So why is this happening? Well we're told, Verse 9.

During the night, Paul had a vision Of a man of Macedonia, Which is, As we know as Greece today, Standing and begging him, Come over to Macedonia And help us.

After Paul had seen the vision, We got ready at once To leave for Macedonia, Concluding, Obviously they'd prayed about it And talked about it, But they concluded That God had called us To preach the gospel To them.

[12 : 48] Now for us to try and figure out What did the Spirit say? Or how did the Spirit lead them? Or what was the vision like? Is to miss the point.

That's not what the text is about. It's simply to reassure us That God, By his Spirit, Directs his mission In all kinds of ways All of the time.

It's God who closes one door, But then he opens up another door. And in this case, It was a door into mainland Europe.

The promise that the good news Would go into the ends of the earth From Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria To the ends of the earth Is beginning to be worked out.

God has a plan, He's sticking to it, And it's happening. Now later on, In Acts chapter 19, We do read that Paul did get to Asia.

[13 : 47] And in verse 10 of chapter 19, We read, So that all the Jews and Greeks Who lived in the province of Asia Heard the word of the Lord. So God was not ignoring these people In these other places.

It was simply That it was not God's time. And we might not always understand God's ways, But we can always trust that God is at work.

God is in supreme control over my life, Over your life, Over every single event in your life, And over his mission.

And he will order everything in such a way That his will is done. So we may long and we may pray For the people of North Korea And long that they are reached.

We may be praying for somebody in our family Or a friend, That they would become a Christian. We've maybe sought opportunity After opportunity To witness to a colleague, But it just seems the door is closed And we're not getting anywhere.

[15 : 05] Well, all of those desires are not wrong. They're wonderfully healthy and good And they're God-promoted. But sometimes Sometimes It's just not God's timing.

Sometimes It's just not God's priority. The fact that things don't always work out The way we want or imagine.

The reality that our efforts Sometimes just seem to come to nothing. We try something, We do something, And, well, it doesn't work. It's not because we're doing something wrong.

It's not because our desires Are not strong enough. No, it's simply That God is directing His mission According to His timing And His plans.

But second, He not only directs his mission, He also opens people's hearts. So Paul has gone down to Troas And they make their way across Eventually to a city called Philippi.

[16:16] They're not given any further direction About where to go Or who they might meet. They just simply go. Look at verse 13. On the Sabbath, he says, We went outside the city gate To the river Where we expected to find a place of prayer.

There's no church in this city. There's no gathering of believers. Because the gospel hasn't yet reached there. But God does have His plan As we will see. The rest of verse 13.

We sat down And we began to speak To the women Who had gathered there. One of those listening Was a woman named Lydia. A dealer in purple cloth From the city of Thyatira.

Now here's a very wealthy Business woman. She sells very expensive Designer labels. That's what it is To have purple cloth then Is the equivalent of Armani Or Gucci Or whatever else they have today.

Designer labels A busy, wealthy woman. And what happens to this woman? Well, she's a worshipper of God. She's not a believer But she's interested in God.

[17:30] And the Lord opened her heart To respond to Paul's message. Now this has God's fingerprints All over it.

A wealthy saleswoman Happens to come down to Philippi. And happens to meet Paul Who happens to go outside the city Down to this particular river.

You see Not only is the meeting Orchestrated by God But the salvation of this woman Is orchestrated by God too.

Look at what it says At the end of verse 14 The Lord opened her heart To respond to Paul's message. I read a remarkable story this week About a woman living in Tunisia.

Tunisia is a country That is closed to the gospel. And she had an extraordinary encounter. She was in her house And she heard a knock on her door.

[18:37] And as she went to open it She asked, who is it? The response was clear. Open up the door I want to come in and eat. She opened the door There was nobody there.

This happened a couple of times. Open up the door I want to come in and eat. Nobody there. Later She was completely amazed When she met a Tunisian Christian She had never ever met before. And she read these words From the Bible Quoting Jesus from Revelation. Here I am I stand at the door and knock If anyone hears my voice And opens the door I will come in and eat with them And they with me.

And this woman who had never met before Explained to her Who Jesus was What that invitation is all about And she became a follower of Jesus. Extraordinary!

Now these things do happen I am not saying they happen every single day And God generally works Through very ordinary means. Let me tell you another story. A Christian friend of mine Told me They were waiting to board a flight And they started talking to this lady.

[19:59] Friendly conversation Chit chat as it happens. They boarded the plane And the lady specifically asked Could they sit next to my friend? The lady was open Full of questions And during the flight They talked about Christ And the gospel.

You see God not only ordains The people that we meet He is the one who opens people's hearts To believe our message.

Look at verse 14 The Lord opened her heart To respond to Paul's message. We like Paul May tell the gospel But it is God Who opens the way for salvation.

God in his plan Will use our words He'll use our conversations He'll use our various personalities And character He'll hear our prayers But it is God alone Who causes a person to believe.

God is the one who opens closed hearts. He's the one who opens up blind eyes. He's the one who opens deaf ears To respond to the good news of Jesus. In fact the opening into Lydia's heart Led to an opening to her whole family.

[21:17] Look at verse 15 When she and the members of her household Were baptized She invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord She said come and stay at my house.

Her whole family Had become followers. And that was the start Of the opening of a church. Look at the very end of chapter 16 verse 40.

It was as if Lydia's house Became the meeting place For this new church. After Paul and Silas Had come out of prison They went to Lydia's house Where they met with the brothers And encouraged them.

And they left. The spirit closed one door He opened up another door He opens up a heart He opens up the way For the gospel to come into a family And he opens up the way For a church to start. But third God rules Over Satan's efforts Look at verse 16 Once when we were going To the place of prayer Looking I guess For other interested people To speak to They say We were met By a slave girl Who had a spirit That's an evil spirit By which she predicted The future Now the contrast Could not be greater Lydia Who we just read about Was the owner Of a high street Designer store Independent Very wealthy This young girl Is at the bottom Of the pile She's a slave We might say today She's a victim Of human trafficking She's got no money Herself But We read in the rest Of verse 16 She earned a great deal Of money For her owners

[23 : 15] By fortune telling But not only Is this girl Enslaved By her owners She is enslaved By this spirit Verse 17 This girl Followed Paul And the rest of us Shouting These men are servants Of the most high God Who are telling you And it's literally Our way To be saved She was disrupting Their message And let's be clear On this Behind this girl Stands I believe The work of Satan He will use Who he can And what he can To disrupt And frustrate God's work Not only Is he out To ruin People's lives He is out To stop The liberating Mission Of King Jesus And how does Paul respond Well verse 18

She kept this up For many days Disrupting Frustrating Annoying Finally Paul became So troubled That he turned round And he said To the spirit In the name of Jesus Christ I command you To come out Of her At that moment The spirit Left Satan's Attempts To hinder God's mission Are quickly Diverted And stopped God's But not only That The girl He used And enslaved Has now been Set free From her Owners She's set Free to Return home And she's been Set free To live The life That God Has intended Her to live God's power Is supreme It was in the Name of Jesus Christ That the spirit Goes from her Christ who Had defeated And disarmed Satan at the Cross Rules over His every Sinister move And of course Satan continues In his activity Today And let's be Very clear Those attempts Can be very Real And sometimes We are very Aware of them And we must Never underestimate His activity But let's also Be clear on This God is not Second guessing His every Move He has Supreme authority Over all He does And he Rules over His every Effort God opens The door To those Who are Enslaved And he Sets them Free He breaks Those chains And those Padlocks He unbolts The door And he Sets People Free Nothing Can stand In God's Way Or does

It Because of What's Happened Paul and Silas Find themselves In terrible Trouble with The authorities Verse 23 After they Had been Severely Flogged That's Whipped They were Thrown Into prison And the Jailer was Commanded to Guard them Carefully Upon receiving Such orders He put them In the Inner cell And fastened Their feet In the Stocks It Seems Things Are Going From Bad To Worse But in This Final Account Of The Story We See For That God Works All Things For His Mission We Sang Earlier About God Working All Things Together For Good And Here's A Classic Example Look At Verse 25

About Midnight Paul And Silas Were Praying And Singing Hymns To God You See You Don't Have To Be Kind Of Excited And Everything To Be Going Well To Be Singing Hymns To God They Were Singing That The Other Prisoners Were Listening To Them Even Though They Were In The Prison Stuck Literally Between A Rock And A Hard Place Through Their Songs They're Exercising Their Trust And Their Dependence In God That No Matter What Situation They Are In They Can Trust That God Is In Control Of His Mission He's In Charge Verse 26 Suddenly There Was Such A Violent Earthquake That The Foundations Of The Prison Were Shaken Now When We Hear News Of An Earthquake Things Go Wrong Bad Things Happen People Die You Don't Survive An Earthquake Especially If You're

[28 : 16] In The Inner Cell As They Were With Your Feet Chained And No Way Of Getting Out And Not Much Energy Because You've Been Beaten And Flogged The Night Before But Look Look At At Once All The Prison Doors Flew Open And Everybody's Chains Came Loose The Jailer Woke Up And When He Saw The Prison Doors Open He Drew His Sword And He Was About To Kill Himself Because He Thought The Prisoners Had Escaped And If His Boss Knew They Had Escaped Well He Would Be Killed Anyway So I Might Well Kill Myself Now But Paul Shouted Don't Harm Yourself We Are All Here Now I Think This Is A Supernatural Event We Sang Earlier About God Sending Every Lightning Bolt Where It Should Go Don't You Think He's In Control Of Every Earthquake As Well And

When The Earthquake Happens Doors Open Chains Fall Off Their Feet And Not A Brick Falls On Anybody's Head Quite Remarkable Every Single Life Is Saved Even The Jailer But There's A Greater Salvation Yet To Be Experienced Verse 29 The Jailer Called For Lights Rushed In And He Fell Trembling Before Paul And Silas He Then Brought Them Out And He As Sir What Must I Do To Be Saved I'm Not Quite Sure If He Knew What He Was Asking At That Point What Must I Do To Be Saved From Kind Of Another Earthquake Or There's Going To Be Aftershocks Or What's Going To Happen Well Paul Paul Paul Paul Paul Just Takes It As It Is And Takes The Opportunity Verse 31 He Replied Believe In The Lord Jesus

And You Will Be Saved You And Your Whole Family You See Paul Not Only Saved This Man's Life From Suicide Not Only Saved Him Physically But God Intervenes Through An Earthquake And Through Paul And He Saved This Man's Life For Eternity You See When Paul And Silas Were Thrown Into Prison By The Authorities It's Almost Like The Gospel Has Been Locked Up With Them Because They Were The Messengers They Had The Gospel With Them And The Door Has Been Bolted Shut It Can't Get Out It's Stuck In The Inner Cell And It's Almost Symbolic Of The World's Powers And The Authorities To Restrict And To Restrain The Gospel And To Keep It In And Not To Let It Out But God In His Power Literally Opens Up

The Door Because His Gospel Will Never Ever Be Chained The Gospel Escapes And It Begins To Do Its Work Immediately In The Life Of An Unsuspecting Jailer Who Just Turned Up To Do His Duty As Do Every Single Day And Then He Meets Christ The Imprisonment The Earthquake The Attempted Suicide They're All Under God's Controlling Hand To Bring This Man And His Family To Christ Look At The Results It's Really Quite Spectacular Verse 34 The Jailer Brought Them Into His House And He Set A Meal Before Them And He Was Filled With Joy Filled With Joy Because He Had Come To Believe In

God Not Just Him But His Whole Family Had Come To Christ So To Go To Go Back to Our God Is God Is Great God Is Great He Is Sovereign There Isn't A Hurdle That Can't Be Overcome And There Isn't One Door That Can't Be Opened Let Me Ask That Question That I Asked At The Beginning The Person That You Might Have In Your Own Mind Who Is Not Yet

[33 : 19] A Believer A Friend People Within Your Family A Colleague Do We Doubt Do We Become Cynical Or Do We Read This And Be Encouraged Afresh That God Is In Control Of Our Lives He's In Control Of The People That We Meet There's No Chance Meetings The Circumstances That We Find Ourselves In The Family That He Has Placed Us In All Under God's Control It's His Mission Things Will Work Out In His Timing And According To His Plan He Calls Us To Be Faithful To Keep Doing What We Can Do To Bring As Paul Simply Did Where He Arrived And Just Brought The Message He Had No Idea What God Was Going To Do But

God Did His Work And God Will Do His Work Through You And Through Me And Through This Church Because It's His Mission And He Will See It Through To The End Let's Just Pause For A Moment Let's Just Take Time Quietly And Privately To Pray Right Now For That Person For The Friend Or Somebody In Your Family That God Wherever They Are God Would Organize Events In Such A Way That He Would See Them Open Up Their Lives And Come To Faith And Help Us To Entrust Those People Into God's Good Hands To Do It Let's Just Take A Moment's Quietness To Pray For That Now Day Cons

Come ■■■■ far One Shadow Lot Cons Light End N Look them So, let's go.

If you are the only believer in your family, that's not a mistake. God has placed you and he has you where he has you for his purposes.

If you are the only believer in your workplace or your college or your school, the friends he has given you, that is not a mistake.

[36 : 45] God has ordered things in such a way for his plan and his purpose. Father, would you please open up people's hearts.

Jesus, would you please open up their eyes. Open up their ears. That they may hear you and respond to the wonderful liberating message of Jesus Christ.

For those we know who are enslaved in all kinds of different ways. Would you free them through your gospel.

Bring them to Christ. But not just them. Would you save their whole families. We thank you that this is your mission.

And help us to trust you to do your work. As we follow you. Amen. We're going to sing.

[38 : 06] We declare your majesty. It's a short song. But we want to declare that his name is exalted.

That he reigns magnificently. He reigns magnificently.