

Acts 16:1-5

Strong Church

5/29/16

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

(Pastor Prays)

It's Memorial Day weekend and it's good for us to pause and think and remember. In Memorial Day – *in memoriam*. It's about remembering men and women who have given their lives or had their lives taken in serving our country's ideals; a pattern – one man or woman dying so that others live, a pattern that should resonate close to Christians here.

Memorial Day recognizes a beautiful earthly truth that makes us as believers look to and cling to a higher, holier and more ultimate truth found in Christ. Paul said it like this in Romans 5:6-8: *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* And it is that truth that drives this text.

Luke is now setting us up for Paul's second missionary journey. Paul has a new partner in ministry. His name is Silas. We met him back in Acts 15:40. This text introduces us to his new intern – Timothy. And the first 4 verses of this Chapter are defined by v.

5. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

How badly I want our church to be strengthened and you to be strengthened. And I want to grow stronger in the faith so that, by God's grace, we – as weak people – grow and create a strong church. I look at Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Silas and Timothy...weak men who God used, so I see:

God Uses Weak People to Create Strong Churches

That's what v. 5 tells us. Let's go back to v. 1 and come forward. Who does God use?

God Uses People With Gospel Determination

Not necessarily hard-headed or stubborn, but people with a mission, Christ-centered motivation. Paul was that kind of man. Let me show you why I say that. It's right there in v. 1. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. Stop there. To Lystra. Do you remember what happened to Paul in Lystra? It was one of the darkest events in Paul's ministry. It's in Chapter 14 but let me summarize it for you.

Paul and Barnabas were preaching in Lystra and God healed a lame man through Paul. Instead of believing the Gospel because of the healing, the people tried to worship Paul and Barnabas. Paul barely got them calmed down when Jews from Antioch swayed the mob and stoned Paul. They threw him into a garbage heap and left him for dead.

Lystra was a bad place. Lystra was one of those experiences when you do all you know to do and it goes horribly wrong. Before we get to Chapter 16, Lystra feels like a failure, like doing all the right things and something terrible happens. For Paul, Lystra could not have been a good memory. He just lost Barnabas and now he is returning to the

arena of his worst defeat. That's not where we want to visit. We want to visit the places of victory and celebrating and joy.

Sometimes God takes us back to Lystra because He has something for us there. Look at v. 1. *Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.* Who would've thought that there would be any Christ-followers in Lystra? As far as we know, Paul and Barnabas were the only ones that preached in Lystra and, if that's the case, then Timothy's mother and grandmother came to Christ through Paul's preaching without him ever knowing it.

Let me just stop and say, you might never know the impact your obedience and witness has on a lost world. You see, when you are faithful to Christ, hardship and failure become holiness and honor to God. You don't know what God is doing through your failure. Paul could never know that while the rocks were pelting his head and body, a backsliding Jewish woman who was married to a Greek would believe in Christ and share that faith with her son Timothy, and that Timothy would become the greatest protégé and companion Paul ever had.

Two of Paul's letters were written to Timothy. Six of Paul's letters mention Timothy as a co-sender and Paul would consider Timothy as his "son" in the ministry. G. Campbell Morgan said as Paul watched Stephen stoned and heard his dying prayer, now Paul went through Stephen's experience and had found Timothy where the stones had been thrown.

It takes a certain Gospel determination, a Christ-saturated motivation, to get up in the morning and go back to where the stones are thrown. But it seems to be God's design to walk His people into difficulty. It's why I abominate the "prosperity Gospel" and the man-centered drivel coming out of so many popular pulpits. It may be God's will for everything to always work out for you or, more probably, it might be that He keeps you going to Lystra, the place of stones. And He does so for His *glory*, not your *party*; for *His* Gospel, to strengthen *His* church.

You see, God uses weak people to create strong churches. He uses people with Gospel determination.

God Uses People Who Know Their Convictions

I want to take a quick look at Timothy and, if we have time, at the controversy.

Let's read about Timothy in v. 2 & 3: *He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*

He was already a believer. He had a Jewish mother who was a believer and a Greek father who was not a believer. In v. 2, we find he had a good reputation and not just in his community, but in the surrounding area. In v. 3, Paul recognized his potential and wanted to have Timothy join the mission. We can't know for sure but Timothy was possibly converted while Paul was there previously or if his mother, who was converted then, had led him to Christ.

V. 4 tells us that Paul and Timothy traveled to the churches in the region delivering the decision of the Jerusalem Council back in Chapter 15. In essence, it said that you don't have to be Jewish before becoming Christian. The sign of the Jewish covenant was circumcision. The message they were delivering in v. 4 was the Gospel of grace: You are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

This poses the question, then: why in v. 3 did Paul circumcise Timothy if it wasn't necessary for salvation? *³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*

Timothy's mom was Jewish. Paul was Greek. You get your religion from your mother in Jewish law so Timothy was Jewish but because he wasn't circumcised and his dad was a Greek. He would've been considered unclean by other Jews and it would have hindered the Gospel ministry.

Paul was not trying to prove a point or win an argument. His concern is the Gospel. Paul's number 1 goal was the cause of Christ and he knew Timothy's background and lack of circumcision would've been a block to Gospel ministry.

It's important to have a strong handle on the Gospel of grace, knowing that what makes you acceptable to God is not what you *do*, it's who you *believe*. And then, once you are saved, you take on the attitude of Paul and Timothy. You remove as many barriers to the Gospel as possible. John MacArthur calls this the two-fold message of Christianity. It's the message of the cross: 1. Salvation by grace alone through the finished work of Christ. 2. Living by a selfless love for people, going to great lengths to see people know Christ.

It's how God builds His church, through weak people who trust a sovereign God.

(Pastor shares the Gospel invitation and prays)