

UPCSA Month of Mission
ii. All People Need God's Love
Acts 16:11-34

How does God guide his church to the right place and time for mission? The passage before us provides important principles for our consideration. There will be sanctified common sense and planning (Acts 15:36). There will be "closed" as well as "open doors" (Acts 16:7,8). There will be guidance by way of circumstances, sometimes extraordinary (Acts 16:9,10), given to individuals as well as the whole team. Discernment and receptivity are the keys. Specific guidance comes to these already on the road as it were, living out the Great Command and Great Commission. Being able to say God sent us with the wind of the Spirit at our backs and his indwelling presence empowering us is a great incentive to mission.

The leading religious question, in Luke's day, with its multiplicity of gods and religions, was "What must I do to be saved?" People believed they were in the grip of fate. All were looking for a saviour, be it through traditional pagan worship, mystery religions or the imperial cult. Today people find similar solace in Free Masonry, New Age mysticism or jingoistic patriotism. However, the basic question is no longer "What must I do to be saved?", rather "What must I do to cope?". How do I put it all together? How do I retain sanity and well-being in our frenetic world? Self-help books abound from Steven Covey to Dale Carnegie. Too often our personal world has to be abruptly disrupted before we consider the really important questions in life.

Life's basic question may have morphed from the 1st C to the present. However, the ultimate need is the same. We need something beyond ourselves offering hope and a solution. Luke reveals God's answer through three lives, very different in every way, transformed by the gospel at Philippi a Roman colony surrounded by the Greek culture of Macedonia. When it comes to salvation God does not simply look at continents, cities and masses of people. He is interested in people as persons. He knows each one of us, our hearts' desires, our aspirations and longings. He knows about our work, our families and our travels. He knows exactly where we are in time and place. Indeed Acts 17:26,27 states "He has determined the exact places where they [we] should live... so that they [we] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." No clinical fatalism rather God's personal providence shaping our lives. Each of us is responsible for what we do with the gospel.

This is no less true of the three protagonists before us. Each in turn responds to the basic question "What must I do to be saved?" Lydia: 'Listen to God's Word in such a way that you find him opening your heart to follow him'. The slave woman: 'Experience the liberating power of the Lord Jesus Christ who not only opens hearts but cleanses lives'. The Philippian jailor: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household'.

Two observations by way of conclusion:

- i. The gospel is proclaimed by way of concern for the whole person.
- ii. There is no separation between receiving Jesus as Saviour and following him as Lord.

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14th October 2018