VCBC-SLG 2022 Fall Term
The Book of Acts
Session #10: Paul's Second Missionary journey—15:36 – 18:22

I. The Apostle Paul's Second Missionary Journey--Overview

Syrian Antioch (15: 36ff)	Paul & Barnabas argued over John Mark	Church only blessed Paul (singular verb)	Syrian Antioch church hurt?
Derbe & Lystra (16: 1-5)	Timothy joined	Paul had Timothy circumcised	All for the sake of Gospel
Galatia, Phrygia—Troas (16: 6-10)	Paul restrained by Spirit to visit Asia (West) and Bithynia (North)	Received Macedonia Call	
Macedonian Philippi (16: 11-40)	Meeting at River, with Lydia household converted	Paul and Silas in jail, ended up converting Jailor's family	Invoking Roman citizenship of the two
Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica (17: 1-9)	Great number of conversion led to riot	Gallio didn't care about accusation against two	Paul & Silas fled to Berea
Berea (17: 10-15)	Berean more noble	Searched scriptures themselves	Paul fled to Athens, Silas and Timothy stayed
Athens (17: 16-34)	Paul gave 1st Gentile-oriented gospel message	A few believed	Paul left for Corinth

Corinth (18: 1- 17)	Met Aquilla & Priscilla & joined by Silas and Timothy	Jews persecuted them to no avail	Paul gave Jews one last chance: "From now on, I will go to the Gentiles"
On way back to Syrian Antioch—Cenchrea, Ephesus (18: 18-21)	Cut hair in Cenchrea; Left Priscilla & Aquilla at Ephesus	Apollo discipled by Priscilla * Aquilla before heading to Corinth	Paul somehow decided not to stay in Ephesus (in Asia) this time
Caesarea—then Antioch (18: 22)	End of Paul's ministry to church in Syrian Antioch		

II. Two Major Events:

(1) The Split between Paul and Barnabas (15: 36-41)

"**36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches**."

Q.1 How did the 2nd missionary come about?

- The 1st one
  - It was a direct and clear calling by the Holy Spirit
  - When the church was worshipping, praying and fasting, and
  - It resulted in very fruitful harvest beyond Palestine reaching into the southern part of Asia Minor, including the Island of Cyprus, with reports of conversion of Gentiles cheered by the rest of churches in Judea and Samaria (15:3)
- The 2nd one
  - Paul made suggestion to re-visit (obviously with the goal of strengthening) the churches they had helped to establish
  - No mention of prayer and fasting or the seeking of God's will

Q. 2 What was their dispute about?

- Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along, who had earlier deserted the team in Pamphylia (right after the first region visited, i.e. the island of Cyprus—Barnabas's hometown, and likely John Mark's too as he was Barnabas' cousin according to Col. 4:10)
- While Paul did not see "fit" for him to join, likely equating John Mark as having "looked back" with his hand on the plow (Luke 9:62)
- Some scholars speculated that as John Mark left not to return to Antioch but Jerusalem (13:13), he might have misgivings of reaching the Gentiles and would only change his mind after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

Q.3 What was the outcome of the dispute?

- The result was a sharp dispute which most commentators see as a very heated exchange of the two, and appreciate the frankness and honesty of Luke's account. Also, it is noteworthy that Luke did not even imply who's right and who's wrong.
    - The two could not come to any agreement, and in spite of putting aside their differences, or to calm down to wait upon the Holy Spirit, or to postpone the trip, they decided to head their different ways
- While Luke did not seem to take side, the church obviously did, because "**Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord."**
    - The verb "commended" used by Luke is singular, highlighting only one of them was commended by the believers, meaning Paul.
- We all know that years later, it seems that both Barnabas and Mark had been reconciled with Paul (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 23; 2 Timothy 4:11)

Q.4 What might we learn from this incident?

- The question remains for us is: while we should follow Luke's example in not passing judgment, if we were either Paul or Barnabas, what should we have done differently?
- A longer term result: most commentors opine that as much as the church seemed to side with Paul, Paul's association with the church in Antioch would never be the same, and for that matter, this first-missional church would never be the same, likely hampered with the fierce division of their two beloved, well-respected leaders to whom they looked up. Small wonder that years later, Paul would write to the church in Ephesus that they should "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3)—well, he learned it the hard way!

(2) The Preaching at Athens (17: 16-34)

Paul's preaching at Athens has always been hailed as an example of how we should proclaim the gospel to gentiles, but it would be helpful to bear in mind some of the backgrounds unique to his sermon:

1. Athens was obviously the center of philosophy of the Greco-Roman world and thus his crowd could be said to be well-versed in Greek philosophy pioneered by great Philosophers like Socrates and his student Plato (some 300-400 before the time of Paul) and many Romans sent their children to learn.
2. On the other hand, as the account in Acts 17 indicates, as great as their philosophical learning might be, they believed in the spirit realm, accepting the beliefs in all kinds of deities, perhaps a reflection of their firm belief in democracy for which Athens was also known—they respect religious views that were different than theirs).
3. Such a democrat outlook also explains why "All the Athenians and the foreigners (i.e. visitors who desired to come and learn their philosophy) who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas" (Acts 17:21)

4. In other words, it was not in their DNA to entertain or accept the idea of absolute truth, and the ongoing pursuit of knowledge (and truth) is their "END", and not the finding of the truth.
5. Obviously, they had little or no knowledge about the person and teaching of Jesus at the time and it appears the Judaism had little influence to the Greek mythology or philosophy even though there were some Jewish presence and some Greeks did attend the synagogue; and
6. This sermon is necessarily a very brief summary of the main points preached by Paul

That's what the Apostle Paul was up against! How might he even begin his message, we wonder!

17:22 "**Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you."**

- Paul began with a word of compliment: "**you are very religious**"
- Paul appeals to their religion, and not their philosophy,
    - the latter is about the mind, and the former, the heart!
    - Even if one is superbly intellectual, his heart is never satisfied or has peace, if he or she is being honest!
- Paul appeals to their open-mindedness: "**to an unknown god**"
    - Meaning as much as they might have a certain religious belief, they are not totally sure
    - Leaving room of a god that they might yet to know.
- Paul now says, " **this is what I am going to proclaim to you"**
    - I have the answer, I have the "right God".
    - What then would his hearers think?
        - Arrogant? Not really, they all are!
        - Not a chance—there is no absolute truth!
        - But such a claim certainly caught their attention!

24 "**The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'[c] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring**.'[d]

Since they also pride themselves in knowledge and reasons, so Paul now reasons with them, appealing to logic

A. If there is a <u>Creator God</u>
    - He would not live in temples built by us
    - He would not be lacking in anything, so would not need us to serve (to offer sacrifices)
B. <u>God lacks nothing</u>: Since He is the Creator of everything: "**not served by human hands"**

- The word, "serve" , "is used of the service done by men to men, especially in the healing of diseases" (ICC, Acts II, 840)—the word is the one we all are familiar with—therapy
- **"He himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else"**
  - We need Him, He does not need us or anything!
  - A distinction between men and gods that the Greeks themselves avow!

C. <u>One same Creator of all humankind:</u>
- Different peoples throughout the world, but one origin and one God!
- Different places around the world, but one God—no territorial gods!
  "26 From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole (*face of the***) earth"**
- In all Greek thoughts and mythologies, "there was no clear parallel" to the creation of one man, Adam. (ICC, Acts II, 842)
- But the implication is huge: we are all but one race, absolutely equal then—it is the very ideal of the uniqueness of the concept of democracy of which the Athenians were champions—no supreme race!

D. The natural question raised is: <u>Why so many races</u> of people today, and <u>spread so far-wide</u> as to have a common knowledge of this One God? The answer:

a. <u>To create dependency that we might seek Him</u>:

- **and He marked out their appointed times in history (***seasons***) and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'[c] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring**.
- We know from Genesis 11 that the spreading of mankind all over the face of the earth was God's intentional action—to humble men so they would not think they could survive with dependency on Him—and that limitedness of their own race and territories had caused humankind to seek out and find God;

b. <u>Not hard or too far to find</u>:

- Now, Paul says, He is not hard or too far to find and reach, why?
  'For in him we live and move and have our being.'
  As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'
  - This particular saying is kind of problematic in that it appears Paul is quoting from their poems
    1st line is from a poem attributed to Epimenides the Cretan (c. 600 B.C.)
    "They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—
    The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!—
    But thou art not dead; thou livest and abides for ever,
    For in thee we live and move and have our being."
  - The s 2ne line is from a Cilician, Aratus (born 3120 B.C.)
    "Let us begin with Zeus. Never, O men, let us leave him
    Unmentioned. All the ways are full of Zeus,
    And all the marketplaces of human beings. The sea is full

Of him, so are the harbors. In everyway we have all to do with Zeus *For we are truly his offspring*."

- While quoting from a Cretan poet (Cretan myth predated the Greek's and was later absorbed into Greek mythology), Paul is not advocating their type of spirituality that we are in God or part of God!
    - But rather the plain fact that, since God created us, He continue to sustain—"The triad…is used to bring out all sides of a man's absolute dependence on God for life." (Gartner, quoted by Barret in ICC, Acts II, 746)—in other words, we are under His care and power! Thus, He is definitely not too far from us, and is a personal God

E. <u>Not an impersonal God</u>

- More than that, Paul quotes from their own Greek poet and agrees that '**We are his offspring**.'
    - The Greek poet was talking about Zeus, and as much as he was said to be the supreme god ruling over other gods and human beings like a just god, it is clear from Greek mythology that he fathered children at times with other goddess, or a times with human women. He was definitely not the father to too many children. Thus, the "offspring" is more metaphorical than literal, referring to Zeus' protection and care for mankind.

F. <u>The Implication</u>:

- Since Paul makes it clear that he is introducing to them the God they had yet to know, and not Zeus who did not create anything at all, according to their mythology. We are the "offspring"—the creation of this Creator God, and the implication therefore is:

  29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.
- The implication cannot be more clear
    - He created us, we are His creation, then
    - How can we create Him, and turn Him in gold, silver, stone—the idols that filled the city of Athens?

G. <u>Call for repentance</u>:

- Any Greek with any sense of logic, cannot argue with Paul at this point, and so Paul goes for the jugular:

  30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."
    - He frankly points out that their error is an error of ignorance
        - Which to us might be a polite way to alleviating some sense of guilt
        - But to the proud Athenians, it takes humility to accept this accusation, but
        - Just the same, Paul asks for their "repentance"

[At this point, we need to be reminded that this is an excerpt of Paul's rather lengthy sermon, and we have to presume that, whether in the agora or in the Areopagus which has a direct view of the Acropolis, a more detailed explanation of who Jesus is, and the most significant part of the gospel of His death and resurrection would have been made plain by Paul, before this call for repentance]

- And the call of repentance is set against the setting of future judgment of God with a reminder to all that the resurrection of Jesus has validated all that is being said the Scriptures and through the words of Jesus Himself.

The Response from the hearers:

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." 33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

As in most evangelistic rallies, you will have a mixed bags of respondents: and it appears, when compared to the response Paul had to his message in other places, the response here was not too enthusiastic.

- But number is never the gauge of our success
- After all, even for Paul any conversion/conviction is 100% the work of the Holy Spirit
- A successful mission is defined by us faithfully, accurately and responsibly present the unadulterated message of the gospel, leaving the result to the Holy Spirit
- Indeed, some of us are sowers, others are reapers and
- At the end, we all rejoice in the day of Harvest John 4:36ff)
- David Brainard is the best example in that while his effort to evangelize the Indians basically reaped no effort in this life time and he died in his early thirties.
- But his life has touched thousands upon thousands to give their lives to finish what he has begun and as a result, they have done "far greater things" than what Brainard could have done by himself.