

Phil 1:1-2 (Act 16) – Ancient Paths, New Beginnings

We are beginning a new series through the book of Philippians. I am titling this series “A gospel shaped church.” Through this letter, we will learn what it means to be a church shaped by the gospel. Before we study the letter to the Philippians, we need to understand how this church began.

In Philippians 1, Paul writes “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.” Acts 16 gives us the birth story of the Philippian church. As the story unfolds, we will see four ancient paths that God uses to create new beginnings in Philippi and in our communities today: Christ directs his mission, Christ opens hearts, Christ confronts powers and idols, and Christ advances the gospel through the suffering of faithful witnesses.

Ancient Path #1 - Christ Directs His Mission. Therefore, we remain Prayerful, Flexible, and Faithful. (Acts 16:6–14a)

- A. **Jesus opens and closes door** - Twice, Christ closed the way they intended to go. A vision sent them across the sea, to Philippi, and they eventually found a group of women praying beside a river.
- i. The mission belongs to Christ. He determines where, when, and how his servants go about His mission.
 - ii. Paul’s plan was reasonable. Asia and Bithynia needed the gospel. Paul’s desire to preach there was godly. Yet Christ had another assignment for that season. Have you ever gone about the mission of God only to be blocked from moving forward?
 - A closed door does not necessarily mean that our desire was wrong. It may mean that Christ is directing us toward the work he has appointed for us now.
 - Paul and his companions remained flexible, attentive, and ready to obey. When Christ closed one path, they continued forward. When Christ opened another, they walked through it.
- B. **Application to Our Church** - The mission of Crossroads belongs to Christ. He has placed us in Stockbridge and Chelsea to love God, love one another, and make disciples. He opens and closes doors.
- i. Seasons change as The King leads. In the life of a church some doors that were once open in the past close. Often, Jesus brings new opportunities that we could not have anticipated.
 - We cannot become so attached to a particular method, ministry, schedule, or plan that we resist Christ’s direction. The mission belongs to him.
 - A gospel shaped church remains prayerful, flexible, and faithful. I am so grateful for how this church has moved forward with prayerfulness, flexibility, and faithfulness to Jesus this last year and half. We have followed Christ into Chelsea, we have stopped a long-standing church event (Buck Bash.) We don’t know what doors God will open or close next, but we remain prayerful, flexible, and faithful.

Ancient Path #2 - Christ Open’s Hearts. Therefore, we proclaim Boldly and Trust God Completely. (Acts 6:14-15)

- A. **Lydia's Story** - Luke tells us about Lydia. She was from Thyatira, a city in Asia known for its textile industry. She was a dealer in purple cloth, an expensive material associated with wealth and status. She was also "a worshiper of God," meaning she had turned away from paganism and become attracted to the God of Israel, though she had not yet come to faith in Jesus.
- i. God opens her heart - Luke writes, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying." Paul proclaimed the gospel. Lydia listened. The Lord opened her heart.
 - ii. This is one of Luke's clearest pictures of sovereign grace. Here Luke shows God's sovereign grace unfolding in Lydia's life.
 - Throughout Acts, Luke tells us that God calls people to himself, adds those who are being saved, grants repentance, appoints people to eternal life, opens the door of faith, and enables people to believe through grace (Acts 2:39, 47; 5:31; 11:18, 21; 13:48; 14:27; 18:27).
 - That is how every Christian is saved. Someone faithfully tells us about Christ, and God graciously enables us to see the glory of Christ, recognize our need, repent of our sin, and believe the gospel.
- B. **Application - Proclaim Boldly and Trust God Completely.**
- i. Proclaim Boldly - We proclaim the gospel boldly because faith comes through hearing the message about Christ. We call people to repent and believe because God commands every person to respond to the gospel. A gospel shaped church is one that walks the ancient path of sharing Christ boldly.
 - ii. Trust God Completely - New spiritual life requires the gracious work of God. A gospel shaped church is one that walks in the ancient paths of trusting God dependently. This works itself out as we give a significant portion of time to praying for the lost to be saved.
 - iii. Balance - This balance of praying boldly and trusting God completely keeps us from two dangers.
 - First, it keeps us from manipulation - We cannot pressure, entertain, or argue someone into the kingdom. Salvation ultimately depends upon God giving life and opening the heart, not our perfect efforts. Salvation depends upon God.
 - Second, it keeps us from discouragement - Some of us have been praying for a child, spouse, parent, friend, or coworker for years. You have shared the gospel, answered questions, and invited them to church, yet their heart still appears closed. The Lord who opened Lydia's heart can open the heart of the person you love. Keep praying and depending on God. Keep sharing faithfully. Yes, their resistance to Christ is stronger than your ability to overcome it, but God's grace is stronger than their resistance. God will win. Rom 8 - He justifies everyone he calls and foreknew.

We all rejoice when the gospel is peacefully received. However, Jesus does not just direct His gospel to peaceful riversides, He also moves it into the idol filled streets. When the gospel moves into the streets, Christ's authority collides with the spiritual powers and idols ruling a community.

Ancient Path #3 - Christ confronts rival powers and exposes idols. Therefore we Surrender everything to Christ's authority. (Acts 16:16-21)

- A. **Christ confronts rival powers** - The Slave Girl's Story - Luke says that she had "a spirit of divination." This girl functioned as a local fortune-teller, and her ability produced substantial income for her owners. Luke is revealing that a genuine demonic power was oppressing this girl.

As Paul later explained to the Corinthians, demonic powers stood behind the pagan worship of the ancient world (1 Cor. 10:19–21).

- The people of Philippi knew the power of pagan religion. They feared spirits, consulted oracles, and sought supernatural guidance. Through this girl's deliverance, they witnessed the superior authority of Jesus.
- When Jesus brings the gospel into a community or life he exposes the weakness of demons. The kingdom takes ground that previously belonged to Satan. We do not need to fear the powers of darkness. We must recognize they exist, and more importantly, that every spiritual power falls beneath the authority of Jesus Christ.

B. Christ Exposes Worldly Idols - When the spirit left the girl, her owners immediately realized what her freedom would cost them. Their response reveals what they truly loved.

- They show no joy that she has been freed from spiritual oppression. They see only the income they have lost. When Jesus touched their money, he touched their god.
 - That is what the gospel does when it is unleashed on a people. Christ confronts the powers that enslave us, and he exposes the idols we depend upon.

C. Application to Our Church - As the gospel continues to take root in Stockbridge and Chelsea, we should expect it to change lives in visible and sometimes costly ways.

- Realize that as we preach, pray, gather, serve, and share Christ, we are taking ground from the enemy, and he hates that. Remember Eph 6 – our war is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil.
 - Gospel shaped churches preach Christ no matter the cost.
- Ask Jesus to Expose your idols: The slave owners should have seen the power of God and repented and believed and surrendered to Jesus. Instead, they got mad and attacked the missionaries. What does your response to Christ's authority reveal about your heart?
Even in Christ, we find that idols compete for our affections.
 - Our idols may include: Money we wanted to keep. Comfort we expected to preserve. Sexual desires we refuse to surrender. Perceived control over our future. Approval from people we admire. A habit that has become part of our identity. A position, tradition, or ministry we consider most valuable. An idea we believe and refuse to let go of.
 - Our strongest reactions to Christ's leadership often reveal our deepest idols. Watch your responses to Christ's authority. Anger, fear, defensiveness, and resentment show us what we are trying to protect from Christ's authority.
 - **Jesus confronts our idols because he came to set us free.**
 - A gospel-shaped church willingly places everything under the authority of Jesus—its ministries, money, methods, buildings, schedules, plans, and future.

Ancient Path # 4 - Christ advances the gospel through the faithful suffering of His people. Therefore, we Keep worshiping and witnessing when obedience becomes costly. (Acts 16:22-40)

A. The Missionaries Suffering- How do you interpret hardship and persecution?

- i. (Explain their suffering). And they were exactly where Christ had directed them. God's sovereign direction led them into suffering, and his sovereign purpose would carry the gospel through it.
- ii. We may assume that opposition means we have misunderstood God's will. Paul would later remind the Philippian believers: "For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29).
- iii. When suffering comes, do not immediately conclude that you have taken a wrong turn. Examine your life according to Scripture. Seek wise counsel. Make sure you are suffering for faithfulness rather than foolishness. Then continue obeying what Christ has clearly commanded.
- iv. Your place of suffering may become the place where Christ displays his sufficiency most clearly.
 - **Christ can turn the suffering of his people into a stage on which the worth of Christ is displayed and the gospel is proclaimed.**

B. The Purpose of the Suffering (Jailers story) - Faithful Suffering is used of God for His mission. "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

- i. Their worship declared that Christ remained greater than their pain. And the prisoners were listening.
 - The word Luke uses suggests careful attention. The other prisoners had probably heard many sounds in that prison—groaning, cursing, anger, despair. That night they heard two wounded men praying to God and singing praises to Christ.
 - Anyone can speak about the worth of Christ when life is comfortable. Faithful worship in suffering displays that Christ is worthy even when obedience is costly.
- ii. The Jailer – God does a mighty work (earthquake and breaks the bonds). **A Jailer goes from death to life.** The gospel transforms the jailer's life and family.
 - The man who once bound the beaten prisoners now washes their wounds and feeds them. The prison became a mission field, the jailer became a believer, and his home became another outpost of the church. God often leads His people in and through suffering for His purposes. His purposes and glory, not our comfort, must become our greatest desires.

C. Application for our Church - Our community will learn something about Christ by watching how our church responds when ministry becomes difficult.

- i. Suffering has always been part of the way God brings about His purposes.
- ii. When we suffer, we may be tempted to pray for God to remove the trial. Acts 16 tells us that a gospel-shaped church worships and witnesses its way through suffering.

Closing - That is the birth story of the Philippian church. These are a four ancient paths Christ calls us to walk that leads to new beginnings.

- i. Because Jesus directs His mission, we remain prayerful and flexible. Maybe you have been struggling to trust God with open doors. Step today into the doors he's opened for you.
- ii. Because Jesus opens hearts, we proclaim the gospel boldly, and trust God completely to bring new life. Maybe you're struggling to trust in God's goodness to draw someone to him that you love. Step into trusting God today with the people you love. Share faithfully and trust completely.

- iii. Because Jesus confronts rival powers and exposes idols, we surrender everything to Christ's authority. Maybe you're struggling today with cherishing idols instead of Christ. He invites you to step out from under the slavery of idols that you thought was freedom and to step into the true freedom that's only found in Him
- iv. Because Jesus advances His kingdom through the faithful suffering of His people, we remain faithful when obedience becomes costly by worshiping and witnessing through our suffering. Maybe today you're struggling with the reality of suffering. You're wondering how to proceed. Step more fully into worshiping and witnessing through your suffering. God will be glorified in you.

God is leading us down ancient paths to see new beginnings. Will you step into His paths? As the music plays, respond to God this morning as he leads you.