

Easter IV:

“Taking the Gospel to Europe – Part I”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for 1st UMC, Grand Junction, Sunday, April 21, 2024

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ website or by clicking this link and finding the date of the worship service in which it appears:

<https://www.christianworldmedia.com/wordstream/fumcgj/search>

Scripture Text: Acts 15:36-16:5 [NLT]

OPENING

“He is my song”, indeed (cf. the closing line of verse 2 of 🎵 “King of My Heart”).

Jumping off point from last Sunday, Acts 1:8: “You will be my witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem, going through all of Judaea and Samaria, to the far ends of the earth...”

One such group of apostles involved Paul, Barnabus, Silas, John Mark, Timothy, and others. In their work, the Lord was truly “the King of their hearts”, and they would sing our song with great conviction: “You are good, good. You’re never gonna let me down.”

After Paul’s conversion and significant growth in discipleship, Luke describes in Acts 13 and 14 how the Holy Spirit led the group of believers in a very significant Christian community, or “church”, in Syrian Antioch to commission Paul and Barnabus and send them off to places west as the Holy Spirit would

lead them in order to accomplish the special work God had for them to do.

This is what that looked like...



Eastern Europe & the Middle East in Our Time



The Extent of Paul’s Missionary Travels



The Area of Paul's First Missionary Journey



Sometime after Paul and Barnabus had returned to Syrian Antioch from their missionary travels and enjoyed a period of peace, a dispute arose there. This was incited by some Jewish Christian teachers from Jerusalem who had, no doubt, heard about Paul and Barnabus' sharing of faith in Christ as the way of salvation quite apart from matters of the Jewish Law.

These Jewish Christian teachers had gone up to Syrian Antioch from Jerusalem to assert that, in fact, circumcision according to the Law of Moses was necessary for salvation.

Well, there followed such an uproar that the first "Church Council" meeting was called in Jerusalem, attended by Paul and Barnabus and a few other believers from Syrian Antioch. The result was an extensive liberalizing of the Jewish Law to allow for Gentiles to become part of the Christian faith without first becoming Jews.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

Scripture reading – by Debbie Beth and Lyndi

CHOIR'S ANTHEM

♪ "My Lord, What a Mornin'"

SERMON THOUGHTS

What a mornin', indeed! Because of the faithful obedience to Jesus' command to be His witnesses, even to the ends of the earth, communities of His followers sprang up all across the region to the west of Palestine, reaching for Europe.

Eventually, the Gospel of Jesus Christ would reach Europe, but the story for today stops at Pisidian

Antioch, indicated by the “squiggly” purple line:



We’ll pick up with the story there next week, but to put a sharp point on what I want to address today, let me highlight a strategic decision of Paul’s AND focus your attention on a verse from Acts 16, the significance of which is so easy to miss: Acts 16:4.

- Paul’s strategic decision: Invite Timothy from Lystra, who was well thought-of by the believers there and in Iconium. (*Expound briefly on this; cf. Acts 16:2-3. Context: Paul’s stoning in Acts 14:19.*)
- Acts 16:4 [NLT]

⁴ Then they went from town to town, instructing the believers to follow the decisions made by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

What decisions were those? The conclusions of the Church Council described in Acts 15 –

²⁸ *“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few*

requirements: ²⁹ You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.”

No circumcision, no sacrifices of animals, no pilgrimages to the Temple, no priesthood. Only three Jewish dietary restrictions and an injunction to avoid the licentiousness that characterized the sexual mores of the Gentile world. That’s it!

Over 600 requirements of the Jewish Law as safeguarded by the religious authorities wiped off the books – because “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit” and to the inner circle of Jewish Christian leaders to not lay a burden on the Gentiles that they themselves could not keep.

CONCLUSION

Instead of the Jewish Law, they knew that had “a story to tell to the nations”:

- One of darkness dawning...and turning to noontday bright.
 - One of Christ’s kingdom coming on earth, the kingdom of love and light.
- Oh, Lord, what a mornin’!

♪ Hymn #569: We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations