Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 16

Introduction
Chapter 16 makes for interesting reading. It reads almost like a story of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. In one sense you would not want to be in Paul and Silas’ shoes. In another way, you would love to embark on such an exciting and challenging adventure.

Within this chapter, we find many lessons we can apply to our own lives to challenge our faithfulness and commitment.

Content
1. A good reputation goes a long way (vs. 1-5).

What does the text tell us about Timothy?

Timothy obviously had a good reputation as a Christian. Other people spoke highly of him. Timothy’s good reputation extended well beyond his home town of Lystra. A good reputation is one of the most valuable things we can possess.

How has the importance of a good reputation diminished in our society today?

Have you ever heard of the FICO score? This is the credit scoring method (automated) for determining someone’s credit worthiness. There was a time when your banker knew you and knew your reputation. Now a computer decides if you get a loan or not. It ignores your actual circumstances and explanations and simply looks at your FICO score.

Also, our society has evolved to overlook reputation and honor those with money or power over integrity. Can you say Bill Clinton?

Why do you think Paul had Timothy circumcised?

Timothy’s mother was a Jew and his father was a Greek. From the standpoint of Jewish law, Timothy was considered a Jew. The Jerusalem counsel had decided that a Gentile was not required to become a Jew in order to be a Christian. However, the converse was true also; Jews were not to abandon the Jewish customs to become a Christian. Therefore, in order to have full recognition and respect as a Jew, Timothy needed to comply with Jewish law.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:20. Sometimes, we need to do things that might not be comfortable in order to not hinder our ministry. Illus: On a mission trip to Mexico when it was very hot, women had to wear dresses and men could not wear short pants.

When someone is going to represent the gospel, anything that might hinder our purpose should be removed whenever possible. A representative of the gospel needs to be above reproach.

2. A classy lady becomes a believer (vs. 11-15).

Notice the apostles found a place to pray and speak even though there was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi (a leading city in Macedonia). True believers will find a place to worship.

What type of person was Lydia?

We know Lydia was there listening to the gospel and with the other ladies worshipping. We also know she was a seller of purple cloth. She was likely wealthy and very successful. She must have had a large home for she housed the missionaries.

How would you explain “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message”?
Lydia was a worshiper of God already. However, God opened her heart to hear and respond to Paul’s message. We must never forget that nothing about our salvation is to our own credit. Even the conviction; even the understanding is of God and not anything for which we can boast.

Notice Lydia said “if you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.” This is almost like saying, “Come and see for yourself if the Lord has come to rule in my life.”

Wouldn’t we all like to be able to say that? It would be great if we could be an open book for our Lord.

God used Lydia to help the missionaries carry out His calling in their life. God will always provide the people and resources for those willing to do His work. Lydia was willing to share her faith and her goods for the glory of the Lord. We should all be willing to do the same.

Read Galatians 3:27-29. Notice that Paul is saying that God will use anyone who will follow Christ and be a child of God. In God’s sight, we are equal though He calls us to different tasks.

3. Will the real motive please stand up (vs. 16-24).

The slave girl has some talent or spirit for predicting the future. She rightly and repeatedly spoke that Paul and the others were servants of the Most High God. However, this was nothing short of confusing to the Gentiles. For a Jew, this made sense but for a Gentile, this likely meant they were servants of the Greek god Zeus or of the emperor who also dubbed himself “savior of the people.”

So after Paul had enough of her nagging reminders, he commanded the spirit come out of her. It obeyed and did so.

Why did the slave girl’s owners become angry about this?

They became angry because they were making money off her and Paul put an end to that.

But what charges did the slave girl’s owners present to the authorities?

Instead of presenting their real motive for having Paul and Silas arrested, they charged them with disruption and unlawful practices among the Jewish faith.

This example should serve as a reminder to us that often when people stir up trouble, we need to look deeper into their real motive. Very often the complaint being presented is a front for the hidden motive which is usually financial or self-serving in some way.

4. A miracle inside a miracle (vs. 25-34).

Paul and Silas received very inhumane treatment as a result of the charges presented against them. Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-27 and reflect upon Paul’s suffering in comparison to the things we often complain about.

They find themselves beaten and then chained in the inner cell of prison.

What does the Bible say Paul and Silas were doing while they were in prison?

They were holding church. They were singing and worshipping God in spite of their circumstances. Contrast what Paul and Silas were doing with how we often handle our circumstances before God. We usually complain at the slightest discomfort.

What miracles do you see within the text of the earthquake and the jailer’s experience with Paul and Silas?

There is the miracle of the timing of the earthquake as well as the damage caused by the earthquake. There is the miracle of the fact that doors were opened and chains released. It is also miraculous that no one was hurt and Paul and Silas were still sitting there.
But the greatest miracle was that God desired for the jailer and his family to be saved. The jailer asked the question we must all ask at some point in our life. What must I do to be saved? I love that question in that it is not an ordinary question. It is a question of desire for something not how to do something. Oh please tell me; how can I experience the joy of salvation?

The jailer and his entire family experienced salvation. Notice that after his salvation, the jailer saw Paul and Silas in a different light. He saw their wounds and needs and tended to them.

When we experience the joy of salvation, it changes how we see others even when they are quite different from us.

**Conclusion**

Reflecting on the characters of Acts chapter 16, we can ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Like Timothy, do I have a reputation for being a devoted Christian?
2. Like Lydia, do I put my faith and my resources out there for God to use as He desires?
3. Like Paul, Timothy and Silas, am I willing to make difficult sacrifices to carry out God’s calling?