

Acts 16:6-18:22 The 5 City Tour

HUDSON TAYLOR is known for taking the Gospel into China and particularly for doing this through assimilating in the culture of China. He took on their culture by eating the food, wearing the clothes and speaking the language. He was very effective in taking the Gospel to China.

In contrast was a mission trip I did to Germany with the Salvation Army in 1991. We would go onto the streets in our para military uniforms, not speaking the language and playing our brass instruments.

It is important to think about the methods we use to make the Gospel known.

We looked at the MESSAGE last week and this week we are looking the METHOD of making the message known.

Here is the summary of the message:

We are to be unbending in our commitment to the Gospel of Jesus so that we end over backwards to make it known.

1. God's mission is continuing

Read: 16:6-10

The Apostles are guided and led by God. Notice that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus and God who are directing the work of the disciples.

We do not need these experiences because we have a direct Word from Jesus in the Bible. Look at John 17:18 where Jesus says as His disciples we are SENT into the world. Or Matthew 28:19 where Jesus commands us to GO and as we go to make disciples. God's mission is continuing through us.

God's mission is continuing and is seen in a diversity of conversions.

2. Diversity of conversions

The Diversity of the places is reflected in the diversity of the people who are converted

Philippi – Roman colony. A prosperous city. People considered themselves to be Romans rather than Philippians.

Read 16:13-15

Lydia a wealthy and independent woman.

Then there is a Young slave girl – **16:16-18**

And then Jailer at the opposite end of the social spectrum to Lydia. **16:25-34**

Thessalonica – most populated city in the region. **17:1-5**

Bereans – **17:10-12** On the one hand you've got Jews opposed or needing persuading on the other hand you've got some who are keen to examine the Bible.

Also Greeks both men and women converted.

Athens – **Intellectual centre**. A great place of learning. A university city. The Oxford of the time and place.

Acts 17:16-17

We see conversion there as well. See 32-34 - Dionysius - Damaris

Corinth – **Commercial centre**

18:1-8 - Crispus

There is a diversity of conversion. Different nationalities. People from different parts of the social spectrum.

The diversity of the people we have here at Lakeshore must be reflected in the diversity of people we have relationships with. And God willing the diversity of people we see come to know Jesus.

This will only happen if we love God but also love our neighbour as Jesus commanded.

3. Diversity of ways

Read: 17:2-3; 10-11. 16:13. 17:17;19

Paul goes to Synagogues like Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth where he taught from the Scriptures. The diversity of the people who are converted is a reflection of the diversity of ways Paul uses to preach.

Not the diversity of the message he preaches but the way he preaches.

There is one saviour and so one Gospel but a variety of ways to take it to people. Paul is unbending in his commitment to the Gospel but bends over backwards for people to know that message. Or even where he preaches. Riverside, jails, synagogue, houses, marketplace, city council

This is a picture of what Paul talks about in **1 Corinthians 9** – where he says he says he is:- **all things to all men**. He follows the example of **JESUS**. Jesus went to a diversity of people when he was on earth. Surprising people. So surprising that he had the reputation as the friends of sinners. He came into a culture using language, eating certain foods, enjoying certain drinks, attending parties – while never sinning.

Jesus sends us into the world. He prayed that we wouldn't leave the world or remove ourselves from it and huddle into a safe ghetto of Christian nicety. He has put every one of us in a time and place with people to bring the good news of Jesus to those people in their culture.

Thinking about and entering a culture isn't just for missionaries. We all do it otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here in the way we are. We have English Bibles, we are in a building, we are sitting on chairs, we have instruments. This is as important to think about as we live alongside people as it is to think about as we try and bring people to church. We don't want any unnecessary culture to put people off. We can't have customs, styles or language that puts people off or that they don't understand.

What about us? As a church and as individuals.

Are we unbending in our commitment to the Gospel so much so that we bend over backwards for people to know Jesus?

Some churches stay in Acts 15. Fighting over the Gospel. Even if they agree on what it is they hold onto it then in case some how it might be damaged. The Gospel is treasure to be passed on.

Growing up we had these things in our house that whenever you went to use them my mum would say no keep it for good. Often things that are given for wedding presents. We can seem to have the same attitude to the Gospel.

Or churches that become so isolated from the rest of the world it is if they think if they go out they'll be poisoned. They then become so out of touch – out of date and culturally irrelevant.

There is a story of a consultant being asked to go to a church to help them grow. After spending some time with them he said you could build a fence around it and charge people to come and see how church **USED to be done**.

The world changes around us we feel threatened so we **circle the wagons**. We might be saying the right things but no one is listening. We can become so dated and removed from people that our church are little more than museums dedicated to the past.

Will that be us?

We lose the reality of how difficult it is to walk into this world of church.

Even to walk into this building.

So you may know the feeling of entering into someone else's world. How foreign it can feel. But we need to put ourselves into the shoes of our friends to help us enter their world and to know what it likes to enter ours. Thinking about the words we use. The things we talk about.

Some people think that being concerned about a pure Gospel or about right doctrine means you become isolated. There are phrases like the **frozen chosen** or **holy huddles** used for people who are concerned for right teaching.

Sydney Anglicans are known in the worldwide Anglican church to be the most theologically conservative. Church statistics show they have grown more than other Anglican regions and denominations. 7-8%. WHY? Most groups of churches when they see they are losing ground ie dying they clamber for what to do and run for their denominational distinctive rather than the Christian distinctive. This is a sure way to die. The Anglican Church I was at in Sydney 30 years ago changed the customs of the church. No robes, no collar, no prayer book. Just the MESSAGE. They changed the METHODS.

John Calvin is a man who is criticised for his views of God's sovereignty in salvation as a cause for not making Jesus known. In the 1500's is what the exact opposite.

In 1555 in France there were 5 known underground churches. As a direct result of his teaching by 1562 there were 2150 Protestant churches totalling about 3 million people. Some of the churches were big with between 4000 and 9000 people. He sent church planting missionaries to Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland as well as across the Atlantic to South America.

The population of the Sunshine Coast is 312000.

Let's say we go for reaching 10%. There are 3% in churches already according the statistics. That leaves 21000 people desperately lost.

Church is like a **LIFEBOAT**. We want to cram as many people as possible in the boat that God is rescuing. That means the boat is going to get **uncomfortable**. Some of us who have been around for a while and like things a certain way will need to think about how others might like things differently and make some compromises. It is a chance to make room and leave a legacy as others would have done for you.

We all need to think about how we exist not just for ourselves as individuals or even as a church but also for those who are not yet here with us.

What will we be prepared to do to make it easier and more accessible for them?

If this one gets full are we going to say oh sorry no more room. No we are either going to find a bigger boat or create more boats. Creating more boats is going to be uncomfortable as well.

Will we be unbending in our commitment to the Gospel of Jesus so that we end over backwards to make it known?