

INSPIRED DIRECTION & DETERMINATION (Acts 15:36-20:38)

The story of the Holy Spirit's work in the people of the early church continued on, even as resistance and disagreements threatened to stifle it.

Paul and Barnabas parted ways, because Paul couldn't agree to give John Mark a second chance to prove himself faithful for mission. Luke tells us they disagreed so strongly, they opted to go their separate ways.

Barnabas took John Mark and left for Cyprus.

Paul tagged Silas and traveled through Syria.

Luke opted to accompany Paul, so the rest of our story testifies to the good work God went on to complete through him and those who journeyed with him in mission. A sharp disagreement the enemy may have intended to halt the flow of the gospel instead resulted in two dedicated streams. Both Paul and Barnabas continued in mission, determined to share the good news.

As Paul and Silas made their way back to Lystra, they added a young man named Timothy to their team, circumcising him to appease the Jews and ensure the receptivity of their message. Still, they carried the good news for Gentiles from the council in Jerusalem.

They were welcome with few restrictions.

As Paul and his companions made plans to carry the gospel into Asia, the Holy Spirit prevented them, instead calling them into Macedonia with a vision of a man pleading for help. With inspired direction and determination, Paul followed the Spirit's lead, racing through Macedonia to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Troas.

He added near the end of this journey in Acts 20:24 that his only aim was to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus had given him.

In Philippi, he brought Lydia to the faith, a woman of considerable means who did business with the rich and powerful. By the Spirit's direction, she would finance Paul's missions and support his work.

A riot in Philippi resulted in an unjust and severe beating for Paul and Silas.

Their Roman citizenship should have spared them that shameful treatment, but as servants of the gospel, they were willing to endure it.

Determined, they pressed on to Thessalonica where they entered the synagogue, enjoyed some success, and again faced the wrath of an angry mob. A riot led to the arrest of their host, Jason, but failed to silence their voices. They pressed on to Berea and the gospel message resulted in many conversions until the men of Thessalonica arrived to oppose them again. Paul was dispatched to the coast. Timothy and Silas remained behind to continue encouraging the people, and Paul made his way to Athens.

In Athens, Paul found an audience at Mars Hill with the Areopagus, a group who gathered to ponder all of the latest philosophies and theories of the day. Using the images and writings of their own prophets, Paul made his appeal in a powerful way and won some of them to the Way.

Paul continued his work in Corinth, warmly welcomed, then received a word of encouragement from the Lord not to be afraid or silent, but to keep speaking despite intimidating threats.. God protected him and, determined, Paul stayed in Corinth for awhile.

Moving on to Ephesus, Paul found believers there had not been baptized in the Spirit, so He laid his hands on them and disciplined twelve of them for two years, so that the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. Eventually, a riot erupted in Ephesus for fear the city's chief attraction, the Temple of Artemis, would be robbed of its revered status. As a result, Paul left the city bound for Jerusalem, resolved to run his race with perseverance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

On a scale of 1 to 10, how determined a person are you?
(1 = not at all, 10 = I regularly run through brick walls)

Who is the most determined person you know?
Where would you put the Holy Spirit on that spectrum?

How does Paul's way of mission model inspired determination?
Do you think His radical determination has anything to do with his reliance on God for inspired direction?

How about you?
Are you more determined when you're confident in your direction?
If we're struggling to follow through on something, could it be we're not wholeheartedly convinced the direction we've chosen is best?

How can we live more like Paul and his companions, a people of inspired direction and determination?

In what direction might the Holy Spirit be calling your group for a life of mission together?
Pray for direction. Live determined inspired for life together.