

# WHITE MEMORIAL

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### WMPC – Men’s Bible Study

Acts

Lesson 8

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#### Read Acts 16 - 17

#### 3 Questions:

**Q1:** Acts 16 is one of the most incredible of all chapters of scripture, perhaps only topped by Acts 17. Questions about Acts 16: Why does Paul go to Macedonia? Why does the “voice” of Acts move from third person (he, him and they) to first person (I, we, and us) at Acts 16:10 — and does it really matter? Who was Lydia, and why is her conversion important? What do you make of her hospitality?

**Q2:** Paul and Silas in prison — Acts 16: 16 - 40. This is our (Christopher’s) favorite “miracle” story of Acts. William Willimon asked of this chapter - who is really free and who is really enslaved? Who is this slave girl of Acts 16? Who is the jailer? Why is he important? Are Paul and Silas free or enslaved - free to worship but their feet in shackles? Can you see in this story the interplay of Roman law, Roman custom, and the history-altering word of God? If so, where do you see it? Who is free in this story?

**Q3:** Acts 17. The most incredible encounter between the historically middle-eastern Judaism and its philosophical and theological thought and Greek philosophical and theological thought. Some questions:

- What is the difference between Thessalonica and Borea - how are Paul and Silas received in each?
- Why does Paul go to Athens (southern Greece) when God had told him to go to Macedonia (northern Greece)?
- Do you know what an Epicurean is/was? Do you know what a Stoic is/was?
- In verse 28, can you discover the ancient Athenian poet who said the words that Paul quotes?
- Do you know what the Areopagus was? Why was it important?
- In Paul’s speech (called by N.T. Wright a ‘chess match’), Acts 17: 22 - 31, how many times does he use the name Jesus? Why? And how does his speech differ from his typical synagogue ‘stump’ speech (e.g. 17: 1 - 4)?
- Do you see Paul as an idealist, a pragmatist, or an opportunist?

#### 3 Insights:

**I1:** On the beginning of Acts 16, N.T. Wright writes:

“Paul’s missionary method, whenever he got to a new town, was to go to the Jewish synagogue first. That meant he and his companions had to be acceptable as fully fledged Jews, able to move freely among the Jewish community without putting up a barrier. Timothy was Jewish because his mother was Jewish; but because his father was a Greek, he had not been circumcised as a baby. Paul circumcised Timothy not because Timothy needed circumcision to become a full member of God’s people, but because it would be much easier to advance Paul’s mission if his companions could all be seen as proper Jews.... While being very principled, apparently Paul felt that different ministry situations called for different practical approaches involving the same issue. What examples can you think of today in which this would also be true?”

(Wright, Acts: 24 Studies for Individuals and Groups, 2010, IVP Connect, pages 80 - 81)

**I2:** Willie James Jennings on Acts 16, and the question of freedom and enslavement:

“Ownership and discipleship are never easily aligned. Luke has made this clear from early in the Acts narrative. Ownership aligned with discipleship is possible, but only under the conditions witnessed by Lydia and not the owners of this slave girl. It is possible only under the conditions of a life being drawn irrevocably by the Spirit into the new reality of intimacy and community. Only those willing to throw open their lives, their homes, and their possessions to use for the sake of the gospel can escape the seduction of ownership.”

(Jennings, *Acts*, 2017, WKJP page 162)

**I3:** Since it is Easter, we will end with resurrection, the final, climatic end of Paul’s Acts 17 speech and the beginning and end of our faith.

From William Willimon:

“Paul mentions the resurrection — a fact completely contrary to our observation of the way the world works. In nature things die, decay, decline. Death is death. What is done is done, over and finished, ended. Yet Paul concludes his speech with the assertion that for Christians the resurrection of Jesus is our ‘assurance.’ Not grass growing in spring, the return of the robin, the opening of the cocoon, or any other naturalistic drivel; the resurrection, something beyond the natural, is the final assurance that this one is ‘Lord of heaven and earth’ (17:24).”

(Willimon, *Acts*, WJKP, 1988 and 2010, page 144)

From Willie Jennings:

“Paul speaks to these Gentiles of the assertive love of God made known in Jesus whose body now stands between life and death. This new time of repentance [see 17:30] is rooted in the resurrection, not death, gift and grace, not subjugation and imperialism. What awaits all people is a new judge, one who is filled with righteousness and set ablaze with justice. This way of repentance invites peoples and actions to see a future that is moving irrevocably toward this new human, the judge of the living and the dead. This, of course, is where this rhetoric of divine desire meets its greatest opposition. All religious speech, no matter how carefully stated, no matter how ecumenical and affirming, no matter how polite, shatters at the resurrected body of Jesus. Because to speak of the resurrection of Jesus is no longer religious speech, but speech that challenges reality, reorients how we see earth and sky, water and dirt, land and animals, and even our own bodies. This is speech that evokes a decision: either laugh at it or listen to it, either leave or draw near to this body. It is his body or your stones.”

(Jennings, *Acts*, 2017, WKJP page 178)

### **3 Links to further study:**

**L1:** Raphael’s *Paul in Athens* one of the curtain illustrations in the Sistine Chapel.

<https://www.artbible.info/art/large/329.html>

**L2:** Again, listed as Acts 20 - but it is about Acts 17. N.T. Wright on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPeHhgBztU>

**L3:** William Willimon - a sermon about the gospel and resurrection:

[http://day1.org/3814-bishop\\_will\\_willimon\\_resurrection](http://day1.org/3814-bishop_will_willimon_resurrection)