



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613
(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG
WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Working Hard to Make it Easier for Others Part 2

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Pr. Tim Boettger

Acts 16:1-5 (ESV)

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Matthew 23:1-2

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat,

Paul gets through Antioch, and he gets over towards Darby and Lystra and Iconium, and he meets a young man named Timothy. And Timothy, we read in our text, he's got a father who's Greek and a mother who's Jewish. So he has this sort of blended history. And because his father is in charge in this culture, he's not circumcised as a Jew. And so there's this identity issue around Timothy, but he's become a follower of Jesus.

Paul likes him and wants to take him on the missionary journey. But Paul has this dilemma because they're ministering to a lot of Jewish people. And the Jewish people of the time didn't listen much to people who weren't a part of their network, in their group. And Timothy, because he wasn't circumcised, created a dilemma. And so you have to decide—what are you going to do to make it easier for Jewish people to come to Jesus?

And I just want you to think about this conversation that the two must have had. Paul, this mentor, walking with Timothy, talking to him, said, "Timothy, you know, your mom's Jewish, but your dad's Greek. I'm assuming maybe you haven't been circumcised."

“No, I haven’t.”

“Well,” Paul says, “you know, we’re going to be speaking to a lot of Jewish people.”

He has a letter in his hand that says this is not required by God. The church has decided this is not a stipulation for being right with God. But Paul wants Timothy to be effective, and he’s walking with him and he says, “You know, we’re going to be speaking to a lot of people who probably won’t listen to you just because you’re not really Jewish.”

So what do you say, Timothy? What do you say to make it easier for them? We have some temporary hardship on you. And then the Bible just simply says: Paul circumcised Timothy. Yeah. And they went on. To make it easier for the Jewish people to hear.

And they went north because Paul had a dream that they should go over to Macedonia. And they got into Macedonia, and the religious order is different there in the West. They can’t go into the synagogues in quite the same way, just like it is different around the world here.

And so they go out to a prayer meeting by a river, and they meet a lady named Lydia, who’s traveling, selling her wares—her purple wares—and to make it easier for her to come to Christ, because she’s seeking God, they just simply explain it to her. She comes to faith, and they baptize her and her whole family, and they just have fellowship with them there. Just a simple way for a family to come to Christ.

And then there’s another lady in this area where she is a fortune teller. And she’s owned by some gentlemen in the community who make a lot of money off her telling fortunes in a demonic spirit inside of her. And she keeps calling out the truth about Paul and Silas.

And finally, Paul grows tired of it, and he says to the demonic spirit inside of her, “Get gone from her in the name of Jesus.” And the spirit leaves. And these gentlemen in the community—here’s what happens to them—they lose their income, the money they were making off of this woman.

And so they rebel, rose against Paul and Silas, and get them thrown in prison for this good deed. And God shows up on their behalf, and he frees them that night in prison. And the jail authority who’s in the room there—the jailer—has nothing he can do, because the jail is flown open and he experiences the presence of God.

And he asks what he needed to do to be saved. And Paul and Barnabas simply said, “Come to Jesus. Put your faith in Jesus.” And he came to faith in Jesus. And get this—if Paul and Barnabas—sorry, Paul and Silas—would have left the prison, that jailer would have been put to death for failing at his job.

And so Paul and Silas said, “For the sake of your life and your family’s life and your walk with God, we’re just going to stay in prison with you.” And they appealed to the authorities and got released. And then Paul headed south. He went down to the southern region there in Italy. And these people worshipped everything. And so Paul adapted his approach there so that they might hear the truth about Jesus in their culture and in their language.

And Paul would later write this about his strategy for reaching people for Jesus:

“Though I am free and I belong to no one—I can do whatever I want”—Paul was—he was a Roman citizen, he was trained as a Jew, he could freely go wherever he wanted, he could have done whatever he wanted, selfishly—“Though I am free and I belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone.” Why? “To win as many as possible.

“To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became like one under the law. I myself am not under the law, but I wanted to win those who are under the law. To those who are not under the law, I did the same. Adjusted for them. To the weak, I became weak.”

And then he said this:

“I have become all things to all people so that I might possibly save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel,” he said.

You know, I've preached in a lot of churches. When I'm with the Baptist, I try to be Baptist. When I'm with the Lutheran, I try to be Lutheran. When I'm with the Methodist, I try to be Methodist. Assembly, Assembly. When I'm with the Pentecostal—it's a stretch for me—but I try and loosen up a little, just so they might hear me. To hear Him. So that maybe someone might be saved.

When we open the Bible, friends, it reveals to us that Jesus is God's answer for all the problems in this world. The hope of humanity is in Him. It's all about Jesus. And to be heard, we might need to adapt and adjust our strategies to different cultures, to different people, and we might need to sacrifice a little—our personal preferences—to throw the gates open so people can come and just hear the invitation of Jesus.

Not everyone will accept it, but we want to do everything we can to be heard so that they might be saved.

Saved from what?

Those who believe in the Son have life—eternal life—the power of His Spirit. Those who do not believe in the Son—the Bible says—they do not have eternal life. Saved from this: God's wrath remains on them. Saved from the wrath of God.

But this is the era we're living in: the era of grace, where the doors of heaven are still open. In Matthew 22—I'll close with this—Jesus recorded for us a story about what the kingdom of heaven is like. He said the kingdom of heaven is—it's like a wedding banquet that a king throws for his son. He's giving the analogy of God the Father throwing a wedding banquet for His Son. It's called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It's a culmination of this era when the church will be caught up with God forever in the marriage supper with Jesus. And he's preparing this banquet.

He said to His servants, “The kingdom of heaven is like this: like a king preparing a banquet for his son who's getting married.” And then the king sends servants—his servants—out into the world to give invitation to this banquet. That's you and me—the servants. That was the early disciples.

And he said the servants go out, and they invite the guests who've been invited, but so many guests just reject them and say, "We don't have time. We don't want to come. We're not available." And so they report this back to the king. And the king says, "Well, go again and invite them. Go again and invite them."

And the servants go back and invite them. And this time, not only do some reject him—some do take him up on it—but not only do some reject him, but they start to kill the servants. They kill the prophets who came to them, and they killed the Messiah who came to them. And these were people God was sending to them.

The kingdom of heaven is like this.

And so they reported back and said, "Hey, not only are they rejecting us, but they're killing some of us." And so then the king said, "Let's go out into the streets and invite everyone. The wedding banquet is ready, but those invited did not deserve to come." No one deserves to come, friends. This is unmerited favor. This is the grace of God being poured out on humanity through Jesus. And He is inviting us in this time—in this era in history—for people to find the salvation of their souls.

But one day, this era will close. This chapter will close. And this is our time to bear witness to the Author of Life.

The wedding banquet is ready.

Those invited did not deserve to come.

No one comes. No one deserves.

But God invites us.

So He said, "If they're not coming, brush the dust off your feet. Let's go to the street corners. Invite to the banquet"—listen to this—"anyone you find. Anyone you find."

So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find—listen to this—the bad as well as the good. No discrimination. They just invited them all. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. They invited them all.

In our day, this would include:

Democrats. Republicans.

Gay. Lesbian. Transgender. Straight.

Married. Unmarried. Single.

Rich. Poor.

They were all invited. To come. Simply to Jesus. And let Him take care of them.

Friends, as we move forward as a church, I just want to ask you—are you willing to help make it easy around here for people to come?

I want to thank so many of you who have sacrificed so much to keep the mission in this church alive. My friends, when I read the Bible and I look at our world, here's what I know: the harvest is still plentiful. The harvest is still plentiful. And Jesus said, the workers are few.

And I just want to ask you, like, what's your part in it? It's a team effort. The preaching ministry is one small part of this. And then there are the tentacles of the church in the world trying to make it easy for people to come to faith in Jesus so they can get to know Him and be rooted and grounded in Him, and grow up in Him—into the life that is truly life.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your Word, which teaches us so clearly what to believe and how to live. We ask that your Spirit would make it clear where we find confusion. I ask that you correct anything in me that I've said that is wrong before you spiritually, and that you would minister to each one of us as we need to hear from you.

We understand that we're stewards of your mission, your work, your trust to us. And sometimes we have fumbled it around in ways that we're sorry for. We understand that we hold the message of hope for a lost humanity. And it is something—to carry it.

So I pray that you would help us sensitize our hearts. Give us your strength, your power as your people in the world, to represent you well and to make it easy for others that you're drawing to yourself.

Help us be adaptable, adjustable, pliable in our strategies, so that we might be as effective as possible for your kingdom.

We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen