

Sermon Script: Marketplace Missionaries 1. When God Redirects You Acts 16:6-15

I'm guessing that a reasonable number of us are familiar with this story...

... The Lord of the Rings

- If we were asked: What is the Lord of the Rings about?
... it might seem like a tough question

Well there's 3 long movies...

... based on three longer books

- ... with a myriad of plots and sub plots
- ... and colourful characters like Gollum and Gandalf and Elrond and Frodo
- Some characters rise and other fall
- There are heroes and villains, triumphs and tragedies
- Where do you start?

But basically, when it all boils down...

... the Lord of the Rings is about Frodo's quest to destroy an evil ring

- That's it isn't it?
 - You could say a lot more as well ... but that's the heart of it
 - Am I right?

So my question for you:

- The Bible: What's it about?
 1. Discuss with those around you
 2. Form groups and write your best answer
 3. Argue against the other groups as to why your answer is better than theirs

I asked this same question...

... to some of our country's top preachers

- On a preaching video resource
- One answer stood out as entirely different to all the others
 - It was Murray Robertson, previous pastor of Spreydon Baptist
 - ... and probably the preacher I've most admired in NZ
- He said:

'The mission heart of God who comes seeking the lost, the poor, the broken and the estranged – that's the Bible's metanarrative from Abraham right through.'

That message needs to come through all our preaching until people grasp it. And when they grasp it they'll start living it out. Everyone brings some kind of grand narrative to their preaching – for some it's just personal salvation or personal wholeness or interpersonal relationships. I think the overriding narrative is the mission of God.' - Murray Robertson

This is fascinating

- Do you think he's right?
- Could it be that we get so sidetracked by lesser themes in the Bible that miss the key point?
- Or that we see what we want to see?

In this quote by Murray Robertson...

... he's saying not all Christians manage to grasp this

... he's saying if you preach it year in year out then some may start to get it

... and if they get it they may start to live it out

- Elsewhere in the interview he talks about how exciting it is when people get it

- He tells about how many many people in his church abandoned promotions and even entire careers to get involved in local mission

For me this diagram here shows what's happened:

- There's the Bible's truth at the top
 - But it comes through the funnel of our culture
 - ... which is rampantly individualistic and materialistic
- You end up with a faith that's about how much God wants to bless me

That's what we want to read when we read in the Bible

- That's what we want preachers to preach when we come on a Sunday morning
- And that's what we want to sing in worship songs
- In fact, that's what most song writers seem to be writing these days
 - ... and it's missing the whole point of Scripture
- It misses the adrenalin pumping mission heart of God
 - ... the life blood of Christianity

I loved hearing how much passion MABCers have for outworking their faith in their workplace...

... during our Godspace 9-5 series

- The series wrapped up with the question: **'Can you think of yourself as a marketplace missionary?'**
 - It felt to me like there was a collective Amen from the church to that question

So today we're starting a series called, 'Marketplace Missionaries'

- For our inspiration, we could turn almost anywhere in the Bible, because it's all about God's mission heart
 - But this particular series will follow Paul's second missionary journey
 - All the way through we'll be asking: ***If Paul did Mission like that, how are we doing it in our 9-5?***

PRAYER

As Marketplace Missionaries, how do you get guidance from God?

- Please turn to Acts 16:6
 - Paul had this amazing conversion experience
 - And had been commissioned to be a missionary to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9)
 - So now on this missionary journey...

Paul is like a hungry man...

... looking for a restaurant or singer looking for an audience

- He knew he could eat and sing anywhere ... but where was the right place?
- Where was to be the most reward?

So notice as I read from Acts 16...

... how Paul gets his guidance

6 Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. 7 Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. 8 So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.

9 That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" 10 So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

Some people go by that 'open door' theory

... and say things like: "If it's God's will my house will sell."

- To which a cynic might respond: *'Why don't you lower the price by \$100,000 and then you'll know God's will by the end of the day!'*
- The guidance Paul and his friends were receiving seemed a bit more specific than that

We can see with this map just how clearly...

... Paul was directed by the Spirit.

- Firstly Paul said he was "kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia" (Acts 16: 6).
- So we can see on this map how he was stopped from moving south.
- Then on "the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them." (Acts 16: 7)

Here there are two doors closing

- You could call it negative guidance
 - ... a sense **not** to go somewhere,
 - ... or **not** to do something even though it otherwise seemed timely and reasonable
- The thing with guidance is: ***It's equally important to know what God doesn't want you to do***

Paul's intentions to preach the Gospel in both Asia and Bithynia...

... were no doubt good, but God stopped him

- He might've found that frustrating
- He might've thought: God why did you send me here if my hands would be tied?
 - In all this territory there's nothing I can do - really?

When did you last get that kind of negative guidance in your 9-5?

- A door closing
 - Or God showing you that something is not the right option
 - ... even though it seemed both timely and reasonable?

And then comes the positive guidance - through a dream!

- This vision of a man begging him to come over to Macedonia
 - How many of you make decisions in your 9-5 based on a dream?
 - ◆ Dreams are hardly reliable!

What must Silas and Timothy have thought?

- Are we really going to traipse all the way through this territory
 - ... and ignore it all for some far off foreign place that we don't really know or understand,
 - ... because of a dream?

Yet strange and unconventional...

... is often God's trademark

- It's that exciting way that being a Christian and really listening to and following God
 - ... results in you doing things so different to what you ever would have imagined

If you've ever read much about U2's lead singer Bono

... you'll know he's an outspoken Christian

- And when he talks about what God has done in his life

... he gives the example: 'I never even wanted to be in this band!'

◆ How much more interesting did his life end up because he listened to God!

- There he is as a young man when he would've been figuring out his future
- And at the top talking with a US President because of the profile his band gave him!

In your 9-5...

... when did you last take one of those big risks, because you felt God whispering in your ear?

... or because you just sensed - like Paul, like Bono - that God was guiding you away from the predictable, the normal, the expected?

Or maybe it's even simpler than that

- Maybe the mission call to you this week ...
 - ... could be to resist the normal route home from work or school
 - ... as you are prompted to call by a friend or relative
 - ... to be an encouragement to them or to help them out
- Perhaps drop in a meal to an unchurched neighbour who you know is struggling

As we can see by this map ...

... once Paul had been stopped from going north or south he could only go back ... or go west

- So because of the vision, they head west

A key thing to notice about this dream...

... is that it would've caught Paul by the heart

9 That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!"

- It's a vision of a man begging
 - This is why Christians often talk about guidance as God putting something on your heart
- I reckon Paul would've been urgent about getting to Macedonia because of the emotional impact of that dream

God wants to capture our hearts for mission.

- Mission is not about duty or obligation.
- It's a calling
- It's when you feel incomplete until you are on task
- ... until you are living out what God has put in your heart

Now before we read the next bit...

... it's worth realising that this is a turning point in history

- The gospel is about to go into Europe for the first time
 - And Europe later goes on to become the first continent to declare itself Christian
 - And from Europe, mission is launched all across the globe

So the areas on the map that Paul went through are modern day Turkey

- Where he's heading to (called Macedonia) is modern day Greece

What happened when Paul landed in Macedonia?

11 We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. 12 From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

You wonder whether Paul must have been looking at every man and every beggar...

... to see if he recognised the man from his vision

- God had called him all this way
 - Something important was going to happen, but what?
- Notice that the city they've arrived in is Philippi

■ Later in the Bible there's a book Paul writes to the Phillipians
Here's verse 13:

13 On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. 14 One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. 15 She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.

What a surprise!

- Mission suddenly starts to happen
- But it's a woman not a man who responds to the message of the gospel.
 - A wealthy woman who with her household responds to Jesus by being baptised immediately in the river where they met.

So this vision that Paul and his friends had followed

... had led them to:

- A woman not a man.
- A Gentile not a Jew.
- A river not a synagogue.
- Wealthy not poor.
- A family not just one person
- And this woman was soon to become a key leader in the church of Macedonia.

It had also begun a continental shift

... with the gospel now taking root in Europe

How different life becomes...

... when you're listening to the Spirit's guidance!

- How different it was for Paul
- How different it was for Bono
 - It seems that our default, as humans, and as Christians, is to think way too small

And if I even stop to consider how life...

... would've looked for me if I could've had the life I wanted when I left school

- All I wanted was to be thought of as an amazing pianist
 - Which I realise now was such a self centred end goal
 - ◆ I had nine years to pursue that
 - ... and discover how empty it was

How happy I am...

... that God redirected me

- That he opened my eyes to things that are so much more important
- And I wish I could say that it was my own clever insights that turned me around
 - It wasn't
- The only thing that changed those years after leaving high school, was that I started listening to God

Hearing the voice of God...

... can be challenging and unexpected at times

- But Paul was already committed to mission
- So he was happy for God to guide him
 - ... and for God to take responsibility for the outcome
- He had already 'got it' as Murray Robertson would say, so it was mission, not his own petty wants and needs that drove him

Can we say the same?

- Are the prayers we pray based around Kingdom priorities?
 - Or our own pleasures?

Mission is God's heart

- He's drawn to help the lost and broken and estranged
 - It's there throughout the Bible
 - And he wants Christians to join him in it
 - So he will plant things in your heart
 - And whisper in your ear

Who is the Macedonian man for you?

- What need is it that moves your heart?
 - If you've been pushed back or heard the door slam will you get up and have another go, as Paul did
 - Will you continue on seeking God until you see and hear the Macedonian man, ... calling you to your next mission?

PRAYER - for Tutors, Teachers, Teacher aids, Head teachers, early learning teachers, lecturers school or tertiary level administrators, students

- Exam term - stress around readiness
- For your surprising guidance; voice of your Spirit
- That while meeting academic needs you'd continue to make us aware at a heart level, of people needs
- That even in an exam term, mission can remain our number one