



St James Woodley - Resources for Journey through Acts (Part 2)

Chapters 13-21 May – July 2020



Week 5: 3-D Mission



SETTLING

In addition to the three dimensions of Height, Width and Depth, Time is considered to be the fourth dimension. Without causing too much disruption to the Space – Time continuum, and given the unlikely option to make use of the Tardis, what co-ordinates would you set? Where would you choose to go and at what precise time? As you ponder the scenario, what are the reasons for selecting your chosen time and location?

FOCUSING

In his letter to the young church in Ephesus Paul tells them:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Spend a few minutes relaxing into God's presence as you try to fathom some of the meaning of these words. Ask the Holy Spirit to prompt and guide your thinking as you explore the dimensions of God's love.



Acts Chapter 16 – The Second Missionary Journey Pt. 1

MJ2 - 3-D Mission – D 1 – DEPARTURE with Decision, Disagreement, Division

Read Acts 15 vs 36 – 41: Luke's use of the term "some-time later" seems to be quite elastic, meaning anything from a few days to a few months. However, during their stay in Antioch, after returning from their first trip, Paul voices the idea of a return trip, with Barnabas, to "see how they are doing". There's a reminder here of the importance of maintaining both care and interest in those young in the faith. In what ways, can you recall, were you so nurtured and by whom?



The decision to re-visit the converts in Galatia was also probably coloured by the need to share with them the requirements on Gentile believers agreed at the Jerusalem meeting. Although Paul and Barnabas agreed about the decision to go, they disagreed about who should come along. Try and imagine the scene of this disagreement. Why do you think was Barnabas so keen to take John Mark that he was willing to part company with Paul? Why was Paul so adamant about not taking John Mark and also willing to sacrifice his tried and tested partnership with Barnabas? Is there a clue to Paul's view of things in Galatians 2vs11-13?

The upshot was that the two disciples parted company. Barnabas stuck by John Mark and they went back to Cyprus (and are not mentioned again in Acts!). Paul now teams up with Silas, who was one of those sent by the Jerusalem council to take the ruling about Gentiles back to the Antioch church. The division between Paul and Barnabas seems regrettable but it spawned new relationships which God went on to richly bless. Archbishop Justin once used the phrase "we need to learn to disagree well" – how can we, faced with the challenges of disagreement, put this into practice?

MJ2 - 3-D Mission – D 2 – Direction with Development, Disappointment and Diversion

Read Acts 16 vs2-8: For this second journey Paul chooses to go overland from Antioch and has to pass through Syria and Cilicia. There is no record of Paul founding churches in these areas so perhaps other missionaries from Antioch had been here. There is insight here into the fact that Paul wasn't blinkered into only seeing his ministry as valid; he was, it seems, happy to encourage and strengthen believers converted by the ministry of others. Does this have a bearing on how we view St James' ministry in the wider context of ministry in Woodley?

This time, avoiding conflict with those opposed to the gospel in the Galatian cities, Paul and Co. carry the news from Jerusalem and strengthening the faith of the young churches. In Lystra they meet Timothy, who clearly impresses them so much that he is asked to join the mission. However, Paul takes what seems the very odd decision, to have Timothy circumcised. Try and work-out just what was going on here. The clear message from Jerusalem is delivered and then, in apparent contradiction, Timothy is circumcised. What was Paul up to?

Leaving the familiar region of Galatia Paul and his friends now head north into the uncharted territory of modern-day central Turkey, and repeated disappointment. The provinces of Asia and Bithynia were apparently closed to them, and so, also avoiding Mysia, they end up in the port town of Troas with nothing to show for weeks of hopeful travel. Paul and his friends may well have felt very frustrated by their failure to minister in the areas that "seemed" the place to go. In a way Troas was "the end of the line". Behind them stood Asia with its "closed doors"; in front of them lay the sea - Paul perhaps decided to sleep on it! Of course, we know what happened next but Paul and Co. may have wondered just where they may have gone wrong. Coping with disappointment and frustration is never easy, so, recognising this, what realistic advice might you give to a friend facing such issues?

Following Paul's dream, the team now take a diversion away from Asia and cross over the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. In verse 16, something changes – doesn't it?

MJ2 - 3-D Mission – D 3 – Determination with Demons, Dungeons and Deliverance

Read Acts 16 vs 9 – 40: The disciples head expectantly for Philippi, the leading city of the area. This is a Roman settlement so there is no synagogue building in which to make a start. However, some Jews and gentile followers of Jewish teaching were meeting outside the city and it is to these that the team make their approach. Lydia is sometimes referred to as the "first Christian convert in Europe". Oddly, perhaps, she was not a Jew but a Gentile, she was not from Europe but from Asia, she was a woman living in a Roman city not a Greek one. We don't know quite what was in Paul's mind as he began ministry in

Macedonia but we are reminded that God often chooses people and places that we may not expect. Consider if this resonates with your own experience and how it might impact St James ministry.

The narrative of events in Philippi is a good read and relates both the costs and benefits of Paul and Silas's ministry there. By the end of their visit, converts have been made and a church established but Paul and Silas have suffered beating, imprisonment and humiliation. Despite the pain endured, Paul's affection for the church in Philippi was abundant, as evidenced in his later letter to them. (worth a read through!).

Reflecting back on the story of MJ2 so far, there have been, after a wobbly start, a series of ups and downs, of encouragements and disappointments, of delight and despair. Paul's determination to "Keep calm and carry on" signposts for us some lessons and challenges. How does this make you feel about our own mission of sharing the good news of Jesus today?



Is there someone with whom you need to "disagree well"? Is there a "repair job" needed with someone with whom your disagreement has damaged your relationship? Take time to bring before God situations where you know forgiveness and healing are required.

Disappointment can weigh heavily upon us. The letter of 1 Peter encourages believers to:

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you".

Use this opportunity to release some of the anxieties that you know you have been struggling to carry.

Continue to pray for our country as the current difficult circumstances work through, remembering our decision makers, health and care services, key workers and all those struggling with health and well-being issues.

One outcome from the closure of churches during the crisis was the wonderful video "U.K. Blessing".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUtI3mNj5U>

Find it on You Tube or elsewhere, and re-run it with a heart open and ready to receive afresh the ancient words from Numbers 6:

"The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."