

The Body of Christ
Acts #19 | 15:36-16:15
January 31, 2021

Pre-Sermon Remarks

PRAYER

Introduction

- ACTS 15 was all about coming together as one new family | How do we live this out?
- Analogy: our bodies have parts that are strong, and parts that are weak
 - I can lift heavier things than my wife, but she can last 4 times longer on a road trip
 - Some of you can run fast, some of you can do needlepoint, or fine motor skills
- The Apostle Paul, whose life we're looking at, used the analogy of a body for the church
 - **1 Corinthians 12** ¹²For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴Indeed, the body is not one part but many.
- Prescriptive vs. descriptive texts | Acts is primarily descriptive

Big idea: Even with our shortcomings, Jesus cares for us as his body.

1. A body that is not yet perfect
2. A body with a variety of gifts that make it stronger
3. A body that is led by the Spirit
4. A body that rejoices in hardship
5. A body that proclaims Jesus
6. A body that uses practical wisdom

An Imperfect Body

³⁶After some time had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers and sisters in every town where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they're doing." ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take along John who was called Mark.

- 12:12 — After Peter's imprisonment, he went to Mary's house, the mom of John Mark

³⁸But Paul insisted that they should not take along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work.

- 13:13 — John Mark bailed on Paul and Barnabas after Bar-Jesus (Elymas) the sorcerer
- The early church included a ministry assistant who was cowardly, a quitter, something

³⁹They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed off to Cyprus.

- Paroxysmos - paroxysm, massive convulsion

⁴⁰But Paul chose Silas and departed, after being commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹He traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Not terribly surprising that these two guys got into a fight

- Barnabas — the encourager. Probably had lots of slow, quiet, late night conversations
- Paul — man of action, intensity, always on the go, “I work harder than all of them”

Who was right? Both, and neither.

- John Mark and Barnabas were cousins | Colossians 4:10
- Barnabas wavered along with Peter | Galatians 2:13
- Colossians 4:10, “if he comes to you, welcome him”
- 2 Timothy 4:11, “Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry.”

POINT 1: The body of Christ is not yet perfect

- Bible makes no attempt to whitewash or cover over the shortcomings of followers of Jesus. This should give us hope that our problems are not beyond Jesus.

Leadership Growth

^{16:1} Paul went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. ²The brothers and sisters at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. ³Paul wanted Timothy to go with him; so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek.

- Interesting in light of Acts 15. He’s both Jewish and Gentile.
- In the days before DNA tests, you could only be 100% sure of the mother — so he’s Jewish!
- Different from Titus later on (another assistant), he’s Gentile and is not circumcised

⁴As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for the people to observe. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

[skipping ahead just a bit, we’ll come back]

¹¹From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for several days. ¹³On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there. ¹⁴A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening.

- God-fearer — a Gentile who believes in the God of Israel
- Purple cloths — most likely wealthy. Later in 16:40, she is the one who hosts the Philippian church community in her home

The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.

- That’s how it works, folks

¹⁵After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

- Later in 16:40, after prison, she is the one hosting a house church

POINT 2: The body of Christ is stronger in its variety. (Different needs, different gifts)

- Jew & Gentile, encouraging and hard working, young and less young, men and women

Led By the Spirit

⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia; they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸Passing by Mysia they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- Did you notice the "us"? Luke, the author, apparently joined up around this time!
- Geography – scholars debate, but the point is that there was a route that made the most sense to them, but Holy Spirit didn't allow them to go that way.
- Holy Spirit = Spirit of Christ |
- Don't you wish you had more info? What does it *exactly* mean that they weren't allowed?
 - Maybe God left this intentionally open so that we would be more open
 - Are you open to dreams, visions, prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit?

POINT 3: The body of Christ is led by the Spirit.

- During his earthly life, Jesus was filled and animated and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In the same way now, the body of Christ is animated and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Imprisoned

¹⁶Once, as we were on our way to prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷As she followed Paul and us she cried out, "These men, who are proclaiming to you a way of salvation, are the servants of the Most High God." ¹⁸She did this for many days. Paul was greatly annoyed.

- Again, honest insight from the authors of Scripture

Turning to the spirit, he said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out right away. ¹⁹When her owners realized that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. ²⁰Bringing them before the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are seriously disturbing our city. They are Jews ²¹and are promoting customs that are not legal for us as Romans to adopt or practice." ²²The crowd joined in the attack against them, and the chief magistrates stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³After they had severely flogged them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to guard them carefully. ²⁴Receiving such an order, he put them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks. ²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

- This is one of those incredibly memorable scenes. What joy in the middle of hardship!
- The more we understand the gospel in light of eternity, the more joy we can have
- Same Paul who called this "light and momentary affliction" in 2 Corinthians 4

POINT 4: The body of Christ rejoices in hardship.

- The deeper that the gospel goes into our bones, the more we are able to not merely *endure* the hardships of life, but rejoice in the middle of them.
- Jesus rejoiced, even throughout his ordeal on the cross | Hebrews 12:2

Gospel Witness

²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul called out in a loud voice, "Don't harm yourself, because we're all here!" ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He escorted them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. ³³ He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

POINT 5: The body of Christ proclaims Jesus.

- These early church leaders were not interested in their branding, just making Jesus known

Shrewdness

³⁵ When daylight came, the chief magistrates sent the police to say, "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer reported these words to Paul: "The magistrates have sent orders for you to be released. So come out now and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They beat us in public without a trial, although we are Roman citizens, and threw us in jail. And now are they going to send us away secretly? Certainly not! On the contrary, let them come themselves and escort us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.

- We've seen this a number of times: deeply empowered by the Spirit, but also practical

³⁹ So they came to appease them, and escorting them from prison, they urged them to leave town.

⁴⁰ After leaving the jail, they came to Lydia's house, where they saw and encouraged the brothers and sisters, and departed.

POINT 6: The body of Christ uses practical wisdom.

The Body of Christ on Earth

St. Teresa of Avila (1500's Spanish nun) Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

- Key words on earth | He is embodied in heaven right now with a spiritual body
- But how seriously do we take this call to be his body on earth?
- In our flesh, we are prone to put our wants and wishes first, but we're called to be his body

Point #1 was that we are not yet perfect. With that as the baseline, which one of these do you *personally* need to grow in? What about for us *corporately* as a church?

- Personal: appreciating the variety, being led by the Spirit, being led by Spirit, rejoicing in hardship, telling people about Jesus, employing practical wisdom
- Church: By God's grace, we can help each other grow in these together!
- Evangelism: Hey, we're not perfect, but come join this family!