

Acts 16:11-15

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

It doesn't make me very proud to tell you that I've always had a difficult time remembering the difference between centripetal force and centrifugal force. I had to Wikipedia it just to write this introduction. I know. That's pretty bad, isn't it? I wasn't in high school all that long ago. That aside. Let me give you my humble probably mostly unscientific distinction between the two. Centripetal force draws things towards a center. Centrifugal force whips things away from the center. Centripetal – towards the center. Centrifugal – away from the center.

I bring this up because historically up to the time Jesus rose from the dead Christianity was always centripetal. God did that by design. His goal in the Old Testament was to preserve the faith. He actually wanted his people to have a fortress mentality. That means the word on the street was, "Don't let in impurities. Don't let in foreigners. Keep all evil influences out. If people happen to be drawn to us, that's great. But we won't be going to them. That might infect us." That kind of culture protects and cares for its own.

That mentality worked well before Easter, but once Easter happened the faith didn't need protection anymore. It needed sharing. It needed expansion. That's the change that Easter made to our faith that we see oozing out of Acts chapter 16. Easter unleashes God's centrifugal force. It makes faith whip out – away from the center of our faith in Jerusalem.

Watch how the story begins, **"From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days."** (v. 11-12) Boring, right? Maybe this feels a little bit like the biblical equivalent of an overexcited friend who comes back from a trip and bores you to tears with every little stop and detail of the trip that you couldn't go on because you couldn't afford it. "We stopped at such and such a place. We went here.

We went there. Blah. Blah. Blah.” And your eyes get all glassy and your mind drifts to a different place.

But God wouldn't do that. He wouldn't bore us. He wouldn't tell us something unimportant. So what did we just learn from this biblical itinerary? We got a reading on God's heart. That's what we got. It's true. We got an insiders look into God's heart. God isn't a God that talks big, but never delivers. He's a God who talks big and delivers even bigger. That's what we're seeing here. What do I mean by that? The Lord has a vision for this world. And he shared his vision with us. His vision is simple: "I want everyone to hear the gospel. I want it universally shared." And here that centrifugal, outward-bound vision is happening. This biblical itinerary is the proof.

And then the rubber hits the road for that vision. **“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.” (v. 13)** We can talk in grandiose, big terms about God's vision and the gospel reaching souls, but, in the end, it's as simple as what happened here. Christians sat down with people and told them about Easter. There's nothing complex about it. Christians sat down with other people and told them about Easter.

There's more in this verse that we need to look at, but for now we need to spend some time understanding why these disciples were so centrifugal and outward bound with Easter. These disciples had an imperative. Just in case you're wondering what I mean by imperative, I'll tell you. I'm saying that sharing Easter is something we, literally, have to do. We're going to look at the issue from two perspectives. First, we're going to look at this from a moral perspective. Next, we'll look at this from a faith perspective.

First, we morally must share Easter. Doctors take an oath called the Hippocratic oath. There are different versions of it in the world, but they all have the same message. When doctors take the Hippocratic oath they are promising to use their skills and knowledge to help their fellow humans. They do that because it is the right thing to do. It's moral. Imagine for a second a doctor who has a patient in for a routine check-up, and while he's examining the patient he notices a spot of malignant skin cancer. He thinks to himself, "Ahh. Forget the Hippocratic oath. It's been a long day. I really don't feel like dealing with this right now." So he sends the patient home with a clean bill of health. What would you say about a doctor like that? What might you call him? Frankly, we'd call him a murderer. The doctor morally must act.

Maybe you never realized it, but the Hippocratic oath applies to you. You're the best medical doctor out there. Think about it. You have a real treatment for disease that heals all ills. Literally! On the other hand, medical doctors always fail. In the final analysis, they fail in their practice because people always die. But Christians have real medical knowledge that is the most powerful healing agent on the face of the

earth. You have the gospel. You have a message that gives people eternal, perfect health. And that's not hyperbole. That's reality. So play this out. Let's say you have a friend who doesn't trust in Jesus. You have a chance to talk with them about spiritual matters and you say, "Ahh. Forget it. It's been a long day." Now ask yourself this question: Who has more guilt? The doctor who could share a treatment that will last only a few years or the doctor who could share a treatment that will give health and life for eternity? Maybe you're feeling a little convicted right now. I do too. Good. Then you know the Holy Spirit is working powerfully in you.

Yes, we morally must share the gospel, but, ultimately, that's not why we do it. Yeah, I know that's a weird thing to say after having just talked about it. But, it's true; we don't talk about Easter because we morally must. We talk about Easter because our faith must. Think of it like this: we talk about Easter because Jesus makes that conviction we just felt go away with his cross and the forgiveness that pours out from it. We talk about Easter because Jesus makes our day. We talk about Easter because the resurrection gives us so much joy. We talk about Easter because we're brimming over with peace. Sharing Easter is something our faith must do.

Here's another way to look at it: there are two reasons to get married. You can get married because you love someone and are committed to him or her for life or you can get married because your future father-in-law gets out his shot-gun. Which one is better? The answer is hopefully obvious. God doesn't put a gun to your head and say, "I'm going to pull the trigger if you don't share Easter." That would be coercion and God never wants to coerce you to do anything for him. What he does is say, "I want you to share Easter because you've seen your future casket and it's empty. I want you to touch a soul with the gospel because you're so stinkin' excited that you've been acquitted of the murder charges against you. I want you to be my Easter witness because our Jesus restored relationship is something you treasure more than anything else in the world." We share Easter because our faith must.

And that brings us to the practical part of this message. Let's take a fresh look at verse 13. **"On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there." (v. 13)** Do you see what these first Christian missionaries did? Did you see how they handled their "faith must"? They were very intentional and thoughtful. They waited for the right time. Did you notice that? On the Sabbath day, they acted. They found the right place. They went to a place where they thought there might be people praying. And that's how simple it is. They found a place where they thought people would be and they started the Easter conversation.

So what practical lessons can we learn from those first missionaries? First, we need to be intentional and thoughtful. Easter is so important that we need to plan to make sharing happen. Look at it this way. If Paul had said, "Well, I hope I get to talk to someone about Jesus today." And then frittered the Sabbath day away playing poker, Lydia and her house would never have been baptized. That's being

centrifugal. We go to people. We're outward-bound. We start the spiritual conversation. We engage.

And, let me tell you, this is not rocket science. The Lord gives you chances to be intentional and to engage in a faith conversation all the time. A guy named Tim helped his friend move furniture a few years ago. He met someone there who hadn't gone to church for years. Drinking problems, a divorce, etc. had robbed him of his faith. And so there he was. God had dropped this guy in Tim's lap. So Tim told him about Easter. That person is coming to this church to this day. Another guy had a relative who wasn't baptized. He talked to her and talked to her. After years of patience and prayer, the timing was right. The person wants to be baptized and have her about-to-be-born child baptized too. Another woman has a son who is depressed. So she brings him to church whenever he'll let her. There are two Trinity girls dating unbaptized young men. What do they do about it? They make sure they connect them to Jesus. Now these young men are coming to Bible classes here. Another man came to Bible classes here recently; due to certain circumstances he ended up in a mental hospital. While he was there he told everyone to come to this church to find out the real deal about Jesus. True stories! Every single one of them.

Why am I telling you all this? To let you in on a little secret... do you know who will make the first and biggest spiritual impact with someone? You. You are the key to Easter sharing. You are the reason people will want to find out more. You are the reason people will come to a church service here or a Bible class here. You are the key.

And that's why it's so important that we all share God's vision. It's not time for this church to batten down the spiritual hatches, protect our own, and try to survive. It's time to get centrifugal. Easter has to go out. We have to be outward-bound. We can't help it. We've got too much joy and peace. We have to vent a little of it – truth be told we have so much joy and peace that we have to vent a lot of it or we'll be overwhelmed. Easter has to get out to everyone. And the only way I know to reach billions people is the same way you eat an elephant. We do it one soul at a time. Amen.