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Preview of a Postmodern Church Plant

By divine direction, Paul was led to Philippi. "...We're forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia..." "...They assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not..." "...Come over into Macedonia..."

Philippi is an expression of the first century Roman world. There was no one true God, the source of absolute truth. There was no grand metanarrative that makes sense of reality. Philippi is an artist's rendering of what a postmodern culture will look like. Luke calls Philippi "the chief city of that part of Macedonia." This heathen city with a theater that probably seated 50,000 people, this city that virtually straddled the Egnatian Road, was a godless metropolis on an interstate. God has been all about penetrating the darkness ever since man's fall. God doesn't lead away from the fight but into the fight. In preparing His chosen people to take possession of the Promised Land, He told them He would lead them to the enemy. Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem. Paul does not happen to come to Philippi, God sends him.

No Church

There was no church in this city. I don't mean a church of our breed, brand, or stripe. I mean no church. This wasn't like planting a church where there were already several New Testament congregations. Like so many unchurched and under-churched areas today, this place had a real need.

Apparently, the city could not meet the minimum requirement of ten Jewish men to constitute a synagogue. The prevailing worldview was

pluralistic. Lacking any knowledge base of divine revelation, relativism ruled. Only a group of women gathered by the river, outside the city due to Roman prohibition, were to be found. (Oh, those zoning laws!) So, the upshot is this: Paul saw a man saying, "Come over to Macedonia..." When he got to Philippi, he found the man was a woman! Lydia, the travelling business woman, and her prayer group birthed the exemplary Philippian church. Luke says, "The Lord opened Lydia's heart." God was drawing these women to Himself. As we look over the stark, barren, spiritual Sahara that is the postmodern landscape, let's remember God is working in advance of our working. In fact, God's work holds the promise that our work will bear fruit.

Opposition

God allows relentless resistance to His gospel work. Expect it. Paul was never surprised at opposition. He never let it stop him. The demonized girl followed Paul and Silas around for what Luke calls "many days." Paul finally had enough and commanded the demon out in Jesus' name. Historically we know that God uses opposition to advance His purposes and show His glory. Why do we think something must be wrong or we must be out of God's will if we get a little opposition? God uses difficulty all the time. Remember, it's not just about overcoming opposition; it's that God uses opposition to get the job done. It's often a set-up for something supernatural.

Riled-up businessmen, the crowd, the magistrates, all formed an opposition coalition. It's noteworthy that they

were not necessarily anti-message. They were stirred up because their lifestyles had been impacted.

Supernatural Display

Arrested, beaten, and jailed, the apostle and his partner should have been filled with doubt and despair. This church-planting effort was a bust! Anybody could see it. But Paul and Silas saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate true trust, real faith. Their prayers and songs ring off the stone prison walls. The earthquake changes everything. One moment they are thinking they're

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powerless and stuck; the next they are winning the jailer to Jesus and holding a baptismal service. Do you think Lydia, friends, and an ex-soothsayer are shouting and crying at this point? Let's never forget that God shows up in His time and in His way.

God Saves

That's right, God saves all who repent and believe. The jailer and his household are added to the nucleus of believers. From a disenfranchised, out of the city limits prayer group to shaking up city hall, God's gospel changes lives. It is the power that changes everything. It is His power that planted churches in first century heathen urban centers. It's His power that continues planting churches in 21st century postmodern cities.