

Sermon Series: Philippians -- Good News

February 23, 2014

## **Title: Teamwork**

Text: Acts 16:1-5, 11-15

Summary: What does it take to build a great team? Luke shows us how God built a world-changing team to bring the Good News to the world. God is doing the same today. Are you on the team?

## **Building a Team**

### **What makes a team?**

What do the Summer Olympics and Winter Olympics have in common? Not very much, really. They used to take place on the same year, but no longer. They happen in opposite seasons (at least as long as they take place in the Northern Hemisphere!). The sports they feature are stark contrasts: sliding around on frozen water vs. swimming in it; hockey vs. water polo; running vs. skating; gymnastics vs. twists and turns in the air on skis or snowboard.

But in one very powerful way Summer and Winter came together in Sochi. At the end of competition for the two women bobsled two Americans stood on the podium to receive the silver medal. Their names: Elana Meyers and Lauryn Williams. And the pairing of these two women is an example of how the Summer and Winter Olympics came together in a winning way.

Elana Meyers was the driver of the sled. She's been bobsledding for years. Not so her teammate Lauryn Williams. Lauryn is a two-time Summer Olympics medal winner. She won gold in the 4x100 relay in London. As for bobsledding, she had never stepped foot in a bobsled until last July. Her first ride down the hill was almost her last. She confesses to looking around to make sure that her suitcase was still handy, just in case she bailed on the whole experiment!

Of course, Lauryn most certainly did *not* bail on bobsledding. Instead, she used her abilities as a world-class sprinter to help push USA sled #1 to the silver medal. Now she would be the first to say that she would have no business in the front seat of the sled. Driving the sled was something that only a highly trained bobsledder could do. But put a world-class sled driver together with a world-class sprinter and you have the best of both Olympics.

### **Building God's Team, Part 1:**

We saw last week that God did a powerful thing in the first-generation church by prompting its leaders to open up the door to the non-Jewish world. They wrote up their decision in a letter which they entrusted to Jewish Christians so that it could be shared

with the new Jewish/Gentile churches that Paul and Barnabas had established in the Gentile world.

When we look at Paul's journey back to those churches we see the power of teamwork. His team originally consisted of a Jewish believer from Jerusalem named Silas and himself. Here were two bona-fide Jewish men, each with long heritages in Judaism. But Paul was born in what Jews called the Diaspora -- the world outside the Jewish homeland. He was thus more cosmopolitan in his outlook and life experience than the Jews from Jerusalem. Silas, on the other hand, was from Jerusalem. He had the credentials for representing the Mother Church. Two men with different backgrounds on the same team with the same message.

Luke tells us that shortly after they began their mission they added a third member to the team:

### **Acts 16:1-3 NIV**

**Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.**

Timothy was half Jewish and half Greek. He and his mother (and grandmother) were followers of Jesus. Timothy was also a next generation Christian -- a young man with a bright future before him. Adding Timothy to the team meant that now it consisted of:

- A Jerusalem Jew: Silas
- A Diaspora Jew: Paul
- A much younger Diaspora "half" Jew: Timothy

Each man brought unique strengths and experiences to the task of announcing the Good News to both Jews and Gentiles. Such is the power of a team.

### **Building God's Team, Part 2:**

But God was by no means finished building this team. When Paul, Silas and Timothy attempted to stay in more familiar regions, the Holy Spirit closed the door, forcing them to the end of the road in a port city named Troas. And it is in Troas that the way the story is told changes dramatically:

### **Acts 16:9-12 NIV**

**During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."**

**After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

**From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went 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.**

Up till now Luke has told us someone else's story. But all of a sudden he begins to use the word "we." Luke is now part of the story. Luke is part of Paul's team.

How did it come to be that Luke became a part of Paul's mission? He never tells us, so at best we can piece together little bits of information to try and reconstruct the story.

- First, it is logical to assume that Luke was in Troas and met Paul and his team there.
- Second, we know that Luke was a physician; perhaps Paul went to see a doctor?
- Third, we know the city of Philippi -- on the other side of the Aegean Sea -- had a renowned medical school. Could Luke have trained there, then headed off to Troas to practice medicine?
- Fourth, Luke goes out of his way to brag on Philippi, calling it both a Roman colony and the leading city of its district. Commentators suggest that such praise for the city could only mean that Luke was justifiably proud of his home town. Greeks were known to praise their home cities.
- Fifth, the newly formed team goes straight to Philippi.
- One commentator goes so far as to speculate that after meeting Luke, Paul had a dream of a man from Macedonia, begging him to come to that part of the world.

So now the team consisted of four men:

- A Jerusalem Jew named Silas
- A Diaspora Jew trained in Jerusalem named Paul
- A half Jew/half Greek named Timothy
- A Greek doctor named Luke

The team was almost ready for bringing the Good News to Philippi. It only lacked one more teammate -- one representing the other half of the human race!

## **Lydia**

### **Philippi:**

Philippi was a city with a lot to be proud of. It was originally founded by Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was the site of a major battle in the civil war that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar. Octavian, later to be known as Caesar Augustus, emerged victorious and settled retired Roman soldiers in Philippi. He also gave it very privileged status as a Roman "colonia." This meant that Philippi and its

citizens were shared the same laws and privileges as those living in Rome itself. Philippi was, in essence, a little Rome away from home.

As a Roman colony, however, Philippi was not open to new, foreign religions. If Paul and his team were to bring the Good News, they would need some help from the Philippians. And the help they found made their team truly "world class."

### **Lydia:**

Luke tells us how they went about finding a way to share the Good News about Jesus the Messiah:

#### **Acts 16:13-14 NIV**

**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 from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.**

Since there was no synagogue in Philippi, Paul and his team went to the most likely place to find Jewish believers and non-Jews who prayed with them. Perhaps Luke himself led the way? In any event what they found was not a Jewish synagogue, but a women's prayer group. And one of the women in the group would play a crucial role in the coming of the Good News to Philippi and the rest of Europe. Her name was Lydia.

Luke tells us that Lydia was from the city of Thyatira and that she sold purple cloth. Thyatira was a city in a region that the Holy Spirit had forbidden Paul to visit. But one of its people was here in Philippi, learning about Jesus the Messiah! Secondly, Luke tells us that she sold purple cloth. Thyatira was a leading center for the production of purple cloth -- an industry so special that at one time it was reserved for the emperor and his family. Purple was the color of luxury and royalty. Thus, Lydia must have been a person of some wealth and influence.

Finally, Luke tells us that she was a "worshiper of God." This means that even though she was not Jewish, she nonetheless had decided to pray to the God of the Jews, joining with them as much as possible.

Now the first named convert in the West was Lydia.

### **Welcome to the team!**

What happened next was that Lydia offered to become part of the team!

#### **Acts 16:15 NIV**

**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.**

Remember what I said about Paul's team only lacking one thing: a representative of the other half of the human race? Lydia became that team member -- a Greek woman who had become a devoted follower of Jesus.

Her role was indispensable: she offered hospitality and no doubt a place for the new Christians to gather. This new faith was radically different from virtually all other religions. It had no temples, priests, sacrifices or status. It would have been most likely thought of as a philosophy or club, a special interest group. In that sense it would have been permitted to meet in someone's home, like the many other clubs and groups in the city. And Lydia offered her home to be just that place: the first address for the church in Philippi.

## **Teamwork**

### **The power of team:**

In a few weeks we will begin studying Paul's letter to this church in Philippi. And one of the things that stands out in this letter is his focus on the power of being a team:

### **Philippians 1:3-6 NIV**

**I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

Time and again we will see him coming back to this idea that we can only do God's work and bring His Good News if we do it together. Such is the power of team.

### **Welcome to the team!**

God builds His team in the same way today. It doesn't matter what your background happens to be. It doesn't matter that you know more or less than the person sitting next to you, or serving beside you. It doesn't matter whether you've been following Jesus for decades or days. God puts us all together to make up His team.

Paul's team needed new people with different backgrounds and experiences in order to succeed in new places. The same is true today. You bring with you a unique set of life experiences that are just what God wants to use in the days ahead.

So how to get going? A good place to start is to plan to join a small group as we study Paul's Letter to the Philippians. We will learn what God had to say to His team in Philippi. And we'll learn what He wants to say to you and me as part of His team today.

Welcome to God's Team!