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Acts 16:16-34 (read to v. 31) “Victory in Jesus”

Intro. This is one of my favorite stories in the book of Acts. I love it because of the expression of victory I see here. Paul said in 2 Cor. 2:14, “Now thanks be unto God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.” Paul said these words several years after the incidents here in Acts 16. Paul knew the truth of victory in Jesus by personal experience.

How about your own life this morning? Are you living in victory, or defeat? Isn't it far better to experience victory than defeat? I'm not talking about a baseball game, or a football game. I'm talking about the kind of victory that matters the most. God intends for us believers to have victory in life. And in this text of Scripture we shall see how we can have victory over Satan, victory over circumstances, and victory over the world.

But let me assure you of this: victory comes at a price—both on God's part and on our part. God did His part by the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. But to know victory in your own life, you have to pay a price as well. You have to learn the principles of victory, and cultivate a great amount of faith. Paul did that, and he knew victory in his daily life. Let's see the victory God gave long ago and how we can know that same kind of victory today.

First of all:

## I. WE CAN HAVE VICTORY OVER SATAN

The Christian church had a wonderful beginning in the city of Philippi with the conversion of Lydia and her household. But where God is working, you will usually find the devil working right behind. And so it was in Acts 16. We read in v.16, “Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.” Satan was working to oppose these missionaries, and we will see how in just a moment. But first, notice with me:

A. The Slavery of the Occult – We read in v.16 that this slave girl was “possessed with a spirit of divination.” In other words, she was a fortune teller. Actually, the word translated “divination” is *Puthon*, the name of the region where Delphi, the sanctuary sacred to the god Apollo, was located. The original name of the sanctuary was Pytho after the serpent which Apollo was believed to have killed there. So she was a “Pythoness.” Her involuntary utterances were regarded as the voice of a god, and she was thus much in demand by people who wished to have their fortunes told. We know from v.18 that it was not a god but a demon that inspired the slave girl. And such being the case, she probably was pretty effective at telling the future. She was not a phony, a trickster playing upon gullible people. She could actually predict the future with a great deal of accuracy. So she was not only a slave of her owners, but also a slave of the demon who possessed her.

Now we need to understand that Satan's main tactic is to deceive people with false religion. Because of this girl's ability, many people in Philippi believed in a false god, who the slave girl said was giving her power to tell the future.

It is amazing that even today there are many people who still consult with fortune tellers. Some may be inspired by a demon, but most are simply tricksters. But think of the untold thousands who are enslaved to such fortune tellers, who do not make a move without consulting such a person, or consulting the astrology charts.

We also seen in our text:

B. The Subtlety of Satan - Notice what we read in v.17, "This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, 'These men are the servants of the Most High God,<sup>1</sup> who proclaim to us the way of salvation.'" Since she was possessed of a demon, we might expect that she would be speaking against these missionaries. Yet it sounds like she is affirming their work! It seems that Satan had a very subtle tactic here. He wanted to give the people of Philippi the idea that this spokesperson for Apollo was in some way linked up with the apostles. This would certainly confuse the people. Now what she said was basically true, just as the testimonies of the demoniacs to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. But there were two problems with what was going on. First, one of Satan's most successful tactics is to tell some truth, but then tell lies with it. According to the language of the New Testament, she was saying that these men were showing *a* way of salvation. Satan and our world of pluralism are both willing to say that Christianity is a way of salvation, but Satan sure hates the truth that Jesus is the only way of salvation. So in the mind of many the god Apollo was telling the people that Jesus was another god they could believe in. Secondly, Paul later said in Eph. 5:11, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). So instead of being hostile toward the apostles, this demon inspired girl was being friendly. She kept on following them around for several days. At first Paul apparently tolerated it, perhaps because he anticipated what would happen if he confronted the demon, and cast it out. But before long he stopped her endorsement by casting out the demon.

I think there is an application for today. We should not seek the endorsement of the world, or of false religion. In fact, if the world is saying good things about us, then we are not preaching the true gospel. 1 John 4:5-6 says, "They (the false prophets) are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them..... he who is not of God does not hear us..." The world not only hears them, but also affirms them. Jesus said in Luke 6:26, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets." We don't need the endorsement of Miller Beer or of some secular club, or even the endorsement of the World Council of Churches! We don't need their financial support either (3 John 1:7). All we need is God's endorsement!

Yet we also see in this story:

C. The Supremacy of God - So Satan was working against the work of Paul in Philippi in a very subtle way. So who was going to get the victory in this situation? Satan or God through Paul? The Apostle Paul was very jealous that nothing be allowed which would indicate that the Church of God had any connection whatever with the powers of evil. So in v.18 we read, "But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out that very hour." Here we see Christ's power over the demonic, for the demon was cast out in His name. Here we see the power of God at work in His people. Here we see the victory of God's servants. The demon came out of her that very hour.

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<sup>1</sup> In Mark 3:11-12 we read, "And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, 'You are the Son of God.' But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known."

The reason for this victory is found in 1 Jn. 4:4, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." There is a chorus that says, "In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, we have the victory. In the name of Jesus, In the name of Jesus, Satan will have to flee."

Oh friend, don't let Satan defeat you. You can have victory in Jesus Christ! So don't let Satan defeat you with temptation. When he tempts you to do wrong, remember James 4:7 which says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Or don't let Satan defeat you with deception. Make sure you know the truth of God's Word, and that will help you know the difference between the true God, and false gods. You should know the difference between a work of the Spirit of God, and a work of a demonic spirit. John the apostle said in 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." May God give us good discernment.

Now in this text of Scripture we see that we not only have victory over Satan, but also:

## II. WE CAN HAVE VICTORY OVER CIRCUMSTANCES

We will talk more about this in our next message, but I want to mention this briefly this morning. One other way that Satan has to attack us is through trials and difficult circumstances. He wants to defeat you with the trials of life, causing you to turn from God. Paul and Silas were faithfully doing God's work, and then they came under attack. If Satan could not defeat their work with deception, he would try to defeat them with the difficulties of life.

Even so, Satan may attack you with sickness, with financial loss, or any other number of trials, just as he did with Job. Don't let Satan turn you from your God, or your faith, or your church just because he attacks you with the difficulties of life. The trials of life should not cause you to turn *from* God but *to* God.

Notice what led up to the difficult circumstances that Paul and Silas experienced. When the demon was cast out of the slave girl, she lost her power to tell the future. V.19 says that "her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone...." People will pay good money for an accurate fortune. And since she was a slave, she did not get the money but her owners did! They were getting rich off this young lady, and suddenly they lost this lucrative income. It is not surprising that they became very upset. People become very sensitive when it comes to their money! So they caught Paul and Silas, the leaders of the apostle band, and dragged them into the market place, which was like the town square with a court house. In their anger over their loss of income, they wanted to have them punished. And so in the excitement of a stirred up mob, the rulers ordered that the two be beaten with the Roman rod. Over and over again they were beaten, until their backs were bleeding and very bruised. And if that wasn't bad enough, they gave them over to the jailer, who locked them into some stocks. How uncomfortable that must have been! No wonder they were will awake at midnight! (v.25).

But Paul and Silas proved to be great examples of Christians who experienced victory over circumstances. Instead of being depressed, complaining about how bad things are, we see in v.25 that they did two things. First, they prayed to God. Paul later wrote in Php. 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Secondly, they praised the Lord. They were rejoicing in the Lord and singing praises to His name! They could shut Paul in, but not God out! Any man can sing when the prison doors are open, and he is set free. But the power of God is demonstrated when a man can sing for joy instead of becoming bitter and sad. An older chorus says, "It's amazing what

praising can do, Hallelujah, hallelujah. It's amazing what praising can do, Hallelujah. I don't worry when things go wrong, Jesus Savior gives me a song, (Repeat 1st line.)

So the next time you face a difficult trial, don't let Satan get the best of you. He will try to use that trial to turn you away from God. That's what he tried to do with Job. But instead, you should spoil his plan and praise God in the midst of your circumstances. After all, Romans 8:28 says, “

We have seen so far that Satan will try to defeat you. He will try to use circumstances to defeat you. Furthermore, if we are not careful, the world will seek to defeat us, pressuring us to turn from Christ into sin. So let's look at yet another expression of victory in this text of Scripture. Here we also see:

### III. WE HAVE VICTORY OVER SINNERS

Yes, we can have victory over the sinners of this world who oppose work of God. The apostle John wrote in 1 Jn. 5:5, “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Even so, we are going to see the victory Paul had over certain people, and also how he shared his victory with certain people.

First, they had:

A. Victory over Their Accusers – Contrast the joy of Paul and Silas with the unhappiness of their accusers. The happiness of their accusers depended on their ill-gotten wealth. As soon as they lost it; they lost their temper and attacked Paul and Silas. They also quickly lost any happiness they had.

Is your happiness and well-being tied to how much money you make? If so, you are probably in for times of disappointment and misery. But Paul's did not. Their accusers paraded their patriotism (cf. Jn. 19:12-15), but it was their love of money that really motivated them. The most sensitive part of “civilized” man is the pocketbook.

Furthermore, they had:

B. Victory Over the Prisoners – If these were typical prisoners, they would have been repeat offenders; in trouble most all of their lives. They may have blamed all their problems on others, and on society. But even though Paul and Silas did not plan on doing some jail ministry, God turn evil into good and used them as a witness while they were in jail. These prisoners were exposed to some men, the likes of which they had never seen before. Even though their backs were bloody and bruised, they were singing praises to God. And notice in v.25 that while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, “the prisoners were listening to them.” This translates a rare Greek word in the imperfect tense, which means that they kept on listening to them with pleasure. They were enjoying some good music! They had a joy about them which could not be explained.

So notice the impression Paul and Silas made on the other prisoners. As we can see from v.26, when God shook the prison with an earthquake, “all the doors were opened, and every one's chains were loosed.” They could have escaped at that moment. In fact, in v.27 we read when the jailer was awakened, he assumed that surely everyone had escaped. But in v.28 we read of something strange. They decided not to escape when there was opportunity! It is possible according to the language of the last of v.28, that the prisoners left their cells and surrounded Paul and Silas, eager to get to know these men.

Now folks, this is an example of the fact that the world is watching us Christians, and when they see us rising above circumstances, then even the unsaved realize that the Christian has something in knowing Christ to which they are strangers. They will tend to want what we have. What a witness Paul and Silas were. What a victory was gained for Christ!

Finally, they had:

C. Victory over the Jailer - Psa. 23:5 says, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies..." (KJV). That became a literal reality in Paul's life. Look at vv.27-28, "

Now I want to point out 4 truths about the jailor. First:

1. His Cruelty – Notice in v.24 that "having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." The jailor was probably not one of the nice guys in town! Most likely he was a rough and rugged retired Roman soldier, since that was one job retired soldiers did. He probably had a few battle scars. In v.24 we read that he "put" Paul and Silas into the inner prison. Actually, it can be translated he "cast or threw" [*ballo*] Paul and Silas into the inner prison. Probably in a rough manner he secured their feet in the stocks. At that point he could care less about the pain they were in. He went off and fell asleep.

2. His Conviction of Sin – Notice what happened in v.27, "And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself." The jailor woke up having felt the earthquake, which brought fear to his heart. His main fear was not for his life, but concerning his prisoners escaping. It was too dark to see (v.29a), and he assumed that they had all fled. And he could not bear to confront the charge of unfaithfulness in his office. And since the punishment for allowing prisoners to escape was death (12:19; 27:42), he drew his sword in haste, and would have killed himself. He preferred immediate death to dishonor. At that point he was ripe for salvation, for when a person thinks about suicide, they have lost hope.

This man was brought to a low point, and it was only then that he was ready to get saved. I wonder what God will have to do to get you to the point where you are willing to be saved?

By the way, the apostle Paul said, "do yourself no harm." I wish everyone contemplating suicide would give heed those words. No matter how bad your circumstances seem to be, the jailer found out that there is always hope in God.

Indeed, the good news is that Christ gives hope in the midst of our darkest hours. So having heard that all the prisoners were still there, he sought salvation from the God of these unusual men, to whom he fell in awe. He probably knew these men were preachers of the God of the Jews. He knew he was not ready to die and face God. So in vv.29-30 we read of an amazing turn of events, "Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" What did he mean by "saved"? He was already saved from physical death. Yet he was probably familiar with what led to their imprisonment. They had cast out the demon from the slave girl who said in v.17, "These men ... proclaim to us the way of salvation." He may have understood little of what it meant to be saved from sin, but he had a conscience and in the presence of good men and their God he felt conviction of sin, and a concern for his soul. Knowing his sin, was there any hope of having a right relationship with their God?

3. His Conversion - Notice the brevity and clarity of their answer. In v.31 they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Clearly

this man was already convicted of his sin. He was already repentant. All that was left was for him to trust in Christ as his Savior.

Have you turned away from a complex way of salvation by works and rituals, and embraced the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ? All you must do to be saved is repent of your sin, and place your faith in Jesus Christ, who died for your sin on the cross. Don't make the Gospel complicated. Trust in Christ today!

I want to make another application. Suppose someone was near death, and they asked you how to be saved, could you tell them? Paul and Silas were able to condense the Gospel down into just a few words.

Once there was a factory worker who was injured to the point of death. He asked if anyone could tell him how to be saved. Out of 30-40 men that had gathered there, no one could answer! How sad!

4. His Change – Here we see that salvation will change a man! In one night he passed from being a hardened sinner into a believing, baptized, serving, and rejoicing Christian! Even so, 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” One way you can know that your salvation is real is if it changes your life. Well, when the Philippian jailor was saved, he changed overnight! Notice what happened:

a) He was baptized – The last of v.33 says, “immediately he and all his family were baptized.” He heard the gospel. Jesus was now his Lord. Since Christ commands us to be baptized, he did not waste time being obedient to the Lord.

b) He became a servant - Jesus said to His disciples, “He that would be great among you, let him be your servant.” Servanthood is always a good sign of the true disciples of Jesus. So notice in v.33 how this man quickly became a servant. Luke says, “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes....” At one time he could care less about the wounds of these men, but now this man was glad to wash and bind the wounds of these servants of God. How lovingly the jailor looked upon his two instructors. How tenderly he washed their stripes. Then in v.34 we read, “Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them....” He served them a good meal. They had probably had no food for a day. He did not wait until morning, but showed kindness without delay. This is the sort of convert the church needs: one who delights to serve the Lord, and is no sooner converted than he sets to work in his own hearty way. By the way, it's a good work indeed to feed a Baptist preacher!

c) He became joyful – Oh yes, v.34 says, “he rejoiced.” Joy ruled at that midnight feast, and well it might, for the prison had become like a heavenly palace and the jailor an heir of heaven. Joy is one of the common results of a true salvation experience.<sup>2</sup> In a world driven by the pursuit of pleasure and entertainment, let us seek instead the joy of the Lord. Jesus said in John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” Don't lose the joy of the Lord by pursuing sinful pleasures that cannot last, and are far inferior to the joy that Christ gives!

Conclusion: Do you have victory over Satan? Do you have victory over circumstances? Do you have victory over the world? If you are not living in daily victory, then I hope you will appropriate the victory that you already have in Jesus Christ. He will give you victory over Satan. You can resist his temptations. You can overcome his trials. You can avoid being deceived by him. Trust in God to save your soul, and He will give you the victory!

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<sup>2</sup> Time did not permit an examination of their victory over the Magistrates (vv.35-40).

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); Oliver B. Greene, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Maier consulted, but not used.

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