

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #38

Acts 16:16-40

One thing we have seen over and over again, as we have been tracking the ministry of Paul, who is taking the grace Gospel of justification by faith to the world, is that his ministry was not easy and it was a ministry in which Paul faced one hassle after another.

In this part of the book of Acts, we come to one of the most famous questions ever asked in Scripture- “What must I do to be saved?” (16:30). The context in which this question is asked was not pleasant for Paul. To get to this moment in which someone from the world finally asks Paul that question was not an environment in which Paul is vacationing at some island resort.

**What we learn here is that sometimes, in the sovereign work and will of God, the situation in which God will greatly use us will be in a situation in which the bottom drops out of our world.** Sometimes God may permit our personal world to collapse and in that very context He will ultimately direct us to do exactly what He wants us to do and put us exactly where He wants us to be.

**It is interesting that in the first century, the people did not shy away from the word “saved.”** In fact, this is the very word used by a heathen Roman jailor. Paul was obviously telling people they needed to be saved from their sins. All people are sinners and they need to be saved from their sin and guilt which is leading them to eternal condemnation.

Somehow in this politically correct world of ours we have lost sight of this point. Paul’s answer is even more anti-world view because most in the world think they will be saved if they try to do something good for humanity. They think if they join a church or promote racial integration or urban renewal or deliverance from poverty that this will do it; this will save them and get them into heaven. But as S. Lewis Johnson said this is like trying to put a “Band Aid to cancer.” It won’t accomplish anything. People need to be saved and only Jesus Christ can save sinners.

**Now last time we saw that God opened the heart of a woman named Lydia; now we are about to meet another woman, whose heart God had not opened.** What we see here is this:

**GOD USED HIS PEOPLE TO COMMUNICATE HIS WORD THAT WOULD SAVE PEOPLE IN A CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY FACED SATANIC THINGS AND IN A CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY WERE PHYSICALLY PERSECUTED AND SUFFERING.**

The circumstances God used to actually save people in Philippi no human could conceive or orchestrate. There are four main historical scenes that unfold in this passage:

**HISTORICAL SCENE #1 – The scene between Paul and a demon-possessed woman.  
16:16-18**

This first scene is important because it sets the stage for everything else in this context.

Paul and his team and also his new converts were going to a specific place to pray. Now keep in mind that they are staying at Lydia's home so they could have just prayed there. We must assume one of two things. Either they wanted a specific quiet spot away from people to pray, or they are going out to a specific place with the idea of meeting some new people in order to share Christ. We must never become complacent in the context of our church. We must be on the lookout for those with whom we may share Jesus Christ.

As they were going, there was a demon-possessed slave girl who was tracking them. She was a fortune teller and she made a lot of money for her owners. As Kent Hughes said "She was a clairvoyant owned by spiritual pimps." She was following Paul and crying out "these men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming the way of salvation" (**verse 17**). She did this for several days. This indicates that Paul and his team went to this prayer spot day after day and she followed them and she kept screaming out this message. This is not a meek, quiet, godly woman; she is a loudmouthed demonic woman yelling things that are actually true, but this is not of God.

Don't kid yourself, Satan and his demonic forces know who actually is a powerful man or woman of God. Satan knows who is on the front lines for Jesus Christ. Satan's goal here is to somehow infiltrate this Pauline team. Satan actually directed this demon-possessed girl to follow these guys and seemingly proclaim what is true.

Now you would think that this is exactly what Paul would want as a marketing strategy. You have a woman who is known in the community as a "fortune teller" announcing who you are and what you are doing. Paul could have said "well we can probably reach her clientele if we let her continue. Let's have her join us and we will lure others in too." But **God does not ever make an alliance with the Devil.**

Christians should never make any alliance with evil people, even if those people who are evil are giving true testimony or seem to be interested in what God is doing. **It does not please God when unclean people do anything, including communicate His truth.** Unclean people may help the poor or promote social reform or promote rights for everyone, even those who are an abomination to God. None of that pleases God. They do not please God because He sees them as evil and corrupt.

This demon-possessed girl kept it up and Paul was "greatly annoyed" (**verse 18**). That word "greatly annoyed" (*διαπονεω*) means that Paul was completely worn out and troubled by this woman (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 110). This woman did not help Paul or refresh Paul, she drained Paul.

Paul finally had enough of this girl and apparently, led by God, turned and said to the demonic spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." Immediately the spirit came out.

Now only the Apostle Paul seemed to see this woman was demon-possessed. The others did not see it or sense it and the others could not cast out the demon. Paul saw it and he did it.

Now some have speculated that this slave girl became a Christian and joined the Philippian church, but the text does not specifically say that. It was truly, however, a great moment for this girl because no longer did the demon have control of her mind, and for the first time she was in her right mind free from any demonic influence.

The moment a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ is the greatest, freeing moment of their lives. The moment you realize all my sins and guilt are gone is the moment you are free.

**HISTORICAL SCENE #2** – The scene between Paul, the satanic businessmen and magistrates. **16:19-24**

By Paul casting out this demon, he has just been involved in a direct attack against Satan and his forces and because of that Satan will change his tactics. He is trying to disrupt Paul from preaching grace and since a demon-possessed girl cannot stop him, he will try another tactic. Paul had just put a halt to the income of this girl's owner. By casting out this demon, he had just ruined their in the profit margin of their business. That does not set well with those boys and they want to get even.

**Now I want us to notice who it is that Satan uses to try to silence Paul from proclaiming the Word of God- wealthy businessmen and leading political officials.** Don't be fooled, Satan works in big business and in big politics. Who do you think are the people who are actually responsible for not allowing prayer or Bibles in our public schools? These are people of education and political power. These are people who are satanic. Just as satanic is this group in Acts.

When the demon left the slave girl, this immediately put her owners in a quagmire. So they went to the magistrates. Roman colonies had magistrates. Unger says typically a Roman colony had two who were responsible for "administering justice" (*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 804).

Now the actual word "magistrate" (στρατηγος) is one that refers to a civic ruler or commander, like a general. These magistrates not only had judicial power, but military power as well (*Ibid.*, p. 419). The businessmen went before the magistrates and they specifically bring up the fact that they are Jewish and they are troubling the city (**v. 20**). Claudius had recently expelled Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2), so emotions were running high against the Jews. **So what we have here is the first major rise of anti-Semitism and the first formal legal charges leveled against Paul, and it is clearly satanic.** Philippi was a Gentile city and Satan is trying to turn the city against the Jews.

Now Satan probably thought if we arrest Paul and his team and physically beat them up and lock them up in jail, we will silence them. So the political leaders beat them soundly, with many blows and then threw them into prison and turned them over to the jailor to imprison them. The idea of "throwing them" is the idea of casting them, literally physically tossing them into prison. There are no human or prisoner rights in this jail. According to **verse 24**, the jailor did the same thing; he threw them into the inner prison and chained their feet in stocks.

By the way, Paul will never forget this experience because he mentions it in II Corinthians 11:23,25 in defending the fact that he suffered to communicate the grace message.

Now let's put this in a context. Paul received a direct revelatory vision from God to go to Macedonia to preach. Paul and his team immediately obeyed and now they are beaten and chained up in prison. We could not blame Paul's team if they would have said Paul are you sure you got a vision from God to come here? Are you sure this is where we are supposed to be? But God is about to do something amazing in this very context that will revolutionize the Philippian church.

### **HISTORICAL SCENE #3 – The scene between Paul and the jailor . 16:25-34**

As Paul and Silas sat there beaten and chained, they started to pray and they started to sing hymns of praise to God. As one commentator said they literally decided to turn this prison into “Sing-Sing.” **Here is the first sacred concert ever held in Europe.** The satanic world was about to learn that it could not shake or stop these Christians.

We don't know what hymns they actually sang but Luke uses a very rare Greek word in **verse 25**, which would indicate the prisoners were very “carefully listening” to what they were singing.

G. Campbell Morgan said when you pray to God and sing praises to God in the midst of terrible circumstances you may expect that you will see God do some powerful things. **Verse 26** says “suddenly” there was a great earthquake and the prison started shaking and all the doors were opened and the chains of all the prisoners were unfastened.

**Now Rome had one very simple principle for every jailor or warden; if a prisoner escapes you die.** A jailor's own life depended on him making sure those prisoners did not escape. That is why according to **verse 27** that when the jailor saw that the prison doors are all open he pulled out his sword and was about to kill himself. He would rather die that way than the way the Romans would make him die.

But just as he was about to do this, Paul cried out and said don't do that, we are all here (**verse 28**). According to **verse 29**, the jailor called for the lights and when the lights came on he was trembling and he ran in, saw everyone was still there and threw himself down before Paul and Silas; he brought them out of the prison and he asked his famous seven word question (six words in Greek) in **verse 30**, “What must I do to be saved?” Here is a tough, worldly, rugged, brutal, Gentile prison warden asking the most critical question that anyone can ever ask in their entire lifetime.

Thank God it is Paul who is in this jail because he understands the grace Gospel. Can you imagine the response the jailor would have received if he had asked the wrong person with the wrong doctrine this question? If he had asked this question of one who didn't grasp pure grace, he would have been given all kinds of confusing answers.

Some would have said “be saved just calm yourself down you don’t need to be saved.

You are a good person, just as good as anyone else.”

Some would have said “well to be saved you need to join this religious organization and follow their rules and sacraments.”

Some would have said “well to be saved you need to repent, confess, and make some public profession of faith. You need to be baptized and you need to follow our catechism.”

Some would have said “well to be saved there are four spiritual laws you need to think about.”

Some would have said “to be saved you need to be as moral as you can be and you need to try to be a good neighbor. Do the best you can, we all make mistakes, but if you really try hard things will turn out just fine.”

Now the answer Paul will give is from God, because God just performed a miracle so Paul could give this answer. Paul’s answer to this salvation question, you will never find from philosophers, psychiatrists or psychologists. The answer to this question of what you must do to be saved comes from the Word of God and from men like Paul who understood the grace of God. Here is the thing about Paul. He didn’t preach God’s Word to appease scholars or philosophers or politicians; he preached God’s truth for sinners.

**Paul is asked the question “what must I do to be saved” and his answer (verse 31) is “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household.” In other words, all anyone must do to be saved is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.**

This answer right here refutes any idea of Lordship salvation. Paul does not say you need to believe and make Jesus Lord of your life. He does not say you need to believe and make Him master of your life. He does not say you need to believe and promise to follow Him as His disciple. Dr. Charles Ryrie said, “the message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; one of them is a false gospel...” (*Balancing the Christian Life*, p. 170).

**What Paul says one must do to be saved is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.** You must trust totally and only in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sins. The noun “Lord” means Jesus is God; the noun “Jesus” means Jesus is Savior and the noun “Christ” means Jesus is the Messiah. This is the One and only Person you must believe in to save you from your sins and if you believe in Him you are saved.

One great theologian who understood grace said “What can I possibly do if God does not justify the ungodly.” The answer is we cannot do a thing. It is impossible for us to justify ourselves for we are all sinners. But God will justify any who will believe on Jesus Christ.

Often time’s **verse 31** is quoted but **verse 32** is missed. **Don’t miss verse 32, because Paul took the time to teach them the Word of God about the grace of God.** Paul apparently gave them a full exposition and explanation of the Gospel of grace as it related to the Lord Jesus Christ to everyone in connection with this jailor.

Notice in **verses 33-34**, that this jailor took them, washed them, brought them into his house and fed them. Often times one who is newly saved has a heart that wants to do good things for those God used to point them to grace. No one told the jailor he had to do this, but he was led by God to do this.

#### **HISTORICAL SCENE #4** – The second scene between Paul and the magistrates. **16:35-40**

A day came when the chief magistrates decided to release those men and they came and said go in peace. Isn't that nice. Now that we have beaten you up and have let you set in prison, we are now letting you go so you may go in peace (**16:36-37**).

Well Paul (**verse 38**) decided to put a little heat on these leaders by bringing up his Roman citizenship. He said, I am a Roman and you have beaten us and thrown us in jail without a trial. The Roman government guaranteed that every Roman citizen received a public trial and was exempt from degrading punishment. When the magistrates heard that Paul was a Roman citizen, they were fearful. They came and appealed to them to leave.

Now why did Paul do this? Why did Paul bring this up? This was certainly not something he was doing for personal revenge or glory. His reason is the furtherance of the Gospel and the church. A new church had been formed and he didn't want these magistrates to give it any trouble. By doing this, he could almost assure the church that these leaders would leave it alone.

According to **verse 39**, these magistrates kept begging them to quietly leave. According to **verse 40**, when Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke left prison, they went to Lydia's house for awhile and taught and encouraged the brethren and then they left.

God was greatly using this Pauline team, but not in the way you would think. Perhaps you find yourself surrounded by terrible circumstances right now. You love the Lord, but things are falling apart. Did you ever stop to consider that God has sovereignly directed you to this moment because He wants to greatly use you to influence others? Stay faithful. Keep worshipping God. Keep coming to church and learning and see if God doesn't do some powerful things for you and with you.

But perhaps you are here and you wonder what do you have to do to be saved from all of your sins and your guilt. Here it is straight from God's Word- "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."