

## Acts 16:16-40

### "Spiritual War & Open Doors"

How many of you realize - spiritual warfare isn't some ideology, or myth of the psyche? That it's not something fabricated to help us cope with tough times or otherwise unexplainable things that seek to set us back, but that it's very real?

As Paul was concluding his letter to the Ephesians he said, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."*<sup>1</sup> In other words; there are times (I wouldn't say every time) that things may surface circumstantially that hinder our progress. But though the setback seems circumstantial, it has roots that are spiritual; does that make sense?

Jesus said, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."*<sup>2</sup> In Jn Ch 8, Jesus referred to the devil as a "murderer from the beginning". Peter said, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*<sup>3</sup> The idea being that Satan is always on the prowl, always preying on people & his agenda is always to bring questions, create confusion, bring chaos into a situation so as to destroy & drag as many people down to hell w/him as he possibly can. By the very fact that you were created in the image of God, he hates even the sight of you. When you give your life to Christ, he only hates you more & when you begin to serve the Lord... now he really wants to ruin you; or drag you down & destroy your life.

Having said that, we need not fear. Here's why; *"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."*<sup>4</sup> Still yet, we need not be ignorant of our enemy's devices. No sooner are lost people saved than Satan begins to hinder the work... & Such would be the case right here in Acts Ch 16. Paul & his team had made their way to Europe, he had been sharing the truth of Jesus at a prayer meeting on Saturdays by the riverside, God opened a woman's heart by the name of Lydia; she & her household were baptized, things were going great... Now look at Vs 16.

### Vs 16-17

The comparison/contrast so common to scripture is often times fascinating to me.

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 6:10-12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 10:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Pe 5:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Jn 4:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Last week we were reading of a lady of means. Lydia; a successful “upper echelon” kind of woman (as it pertains to the social latter) whom Paul ministered to & led to the Lord. Now directly on the heels of what God was doing in *her* life, our attention is turned to a demon possessed slave girl who was on the polar opposite end of the scale.

Today this girl would probably be considered a victim of human trafficking. The truth is that she was being pimped (spiritually) for profit... But as to where Lydia was in a place where she was seeking; this girl was blinded & enslaved to Satan. The beautiful thing is that the power of Christ is sufficient to save both.

Now; no doubt much of what’s considered “fortune telling” today is nothing more than a money-making scam that plays off of the insecurity & emotional instability of others. However; this was not that. This was genuine occultic activity, demonic possession & supernatural insight delivered by the powers/principalities & rulers of darkness that we war against.

2 things w/that. #1 Demons aren’t gods. Therefore we don’t believe they can read the mind or know the future. Though they certainly can know insight into your life or the lives of others that no one else could know through simple observation. & They can certainly seek to steer events toward a previously predicted conclusion. But God alone (Jer 17:10) searches the heart & tests the mind, He alone declares the end from the beginning.

The other thing I’d have you know is that the bible is clear that you & me; we are to have nothing to do w/this kind of thing. We’re not to consult mediums, “psychics”, witches, soothsayers or anyone practices divination. We’re not to try & reach a relative who’s passed or anything like that. It’s demonic, it’s dangerous, it’s deceitful. In the book of Isaiah we read, *“And when they say to you, “Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,” should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”*<sup>5</sup>

Why seek the dead on behalf of the living? We’re to be seeking the Living God! We’re to be seeking counsel from His word which contains *all things* (2 Pet 1:3) that pertain to life & godliness, we need nothing further. In the NT we read it like this, *“I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple* (innocent) *concerning evil.”*<sup>6</sup> Don’t look into it, don’t become curious about it, just forget about it & seek the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 8:19–20]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 16:19]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Btw, did you notice this was happening as they, “went to prayer”? Satan loves to harass you on your way to church, or as you’re getting ready for church, or the evening before church... Have you noticed that? See it for what it is, don’t be ignorant of his devices. They’re trying to minister, she’s running interference.

She’s crying out after them, “These men are the servants of the Most High God”... We hear that & think, well... that’s true so... But listen; when *you* hear “Most High God”, you think of the God of the bible, Elohim, Yahweh... In Ancient Macedonia they’d use the same phrase to speak of Zeus; if you weren’t familiar w/scripture you may not automatically think in biblical terms. So let’s see this for what it is. - Was what this demon was uttering true? Yes. Was it clear? No; it was confusing, misleading, could be taken in different directions.

When we read she was saying, “they proclaim to us the way of salvation”, again there’s no definite article before the word “way” in the Greek. She wasn’t saying “The” way. She was saying “a way”. Again, it could be confusing to the hearer, perhaps they have a religion (one of many different paths) someone might take... Trust me when I tell you, she wasn’t helping their cause.

Vs 18

“That very hour” is another way of saying, “at that very moment”, it happened instantly. We kind of wonder why it took several days for him to deliver her. I don’t know if he wasn’t initially sure if she was possessed but it became evident the more it kept happening; or if he was simply trying not to be taken off course from discipling these new believers... But for whatever reason, for Paul, it came to the point where enough was enough.

He didn’t need the witness of the demonic; some demon distorting & confusing the the clear cut truth of the gospel. Remember what James said? He said, *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”*<sup>7</sup> This demon wasn’t offering anything “pure” to the equation, it was polluting the work Paul was about. Demonic wisdom brings confusion (James 3:15-16) & that was the net effect of her following them around.

Listen, God wants others to hear *about* Him, from those who are connected *to* Him & have a relationship *w/Him*. Beyond that, what fellowship has light *w/darkness*?

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jas 3:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

To be honest, this thing was getting on Paul's nerves. So he turned to her & said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of J.C. to come out of her." Notice, he didn't speak to her, he spoke to the demon (when casting it out), but beyond that; he did nothing in his own authority, he kept Jesus between himself & the enemy. **He didn't speak to the demon except in the authority of J.C. Always keep Jesus between yourself & the enemy. He is your shield, your strong tower, your ever-present help in time of need, apart from Him, we can do nothing. Our authority is in Christ alone.**

So what do you think happens now? Do you think these men (her masters) were elated over her deliverance & restoration? No; they're infuriated at their sudden loss of revenue... notice.

### Vs 19-24

I'm telling you; justice in the ancient world was served up differently! I'm not saying there was never any order or due process, but it seems so often things would be subjected to almost a mob mentality. These men didn't care anything for the girl, only the money. & Once she'd lost her "magic", they were *mad!* Even "furious" we might say... So Paul & Silas were going to pay.

**Now; why were those 2 singled out (as opposed to Luke & Timothy who were w/them)? Quite frankly it was racism, ethnic discrimination. You should know that historically, it wasn't long before this that the Emperor (Claudius) had banished all the Jews from the city of Rome (Acts 18:2).** So the sentiment of anti-Semitism was permeating throughout the Roman Empire. Add to that, that Philippi was a Roman colony (remember; a little Rome away from Rome) & then look at the 1<sup>st</sup> thing that comes out of these men's mouths. "These men *being Jews*, exceedingly trouble our city."

**At the expense of sounding a little harsh (w/nothing harsh intended), Paul & Silas were the obvious Jews, so they grabbed hold of them. Luke was a Gentile, Timothy was ½ Greek so he may not have "fit the profile". But these 2 were Jews (plus they were the leaders of the group). So they dragged them down to the marketplace before the magistrates (the authorities).**

They accuse them of being troublemakers, trying to turn the people away "authorized religions"... You should also know that the official "Roman religion" (if you will) was Caesar worship. They were to proclaim that Caesar was Lord. Paul & Silas were preaching, "Jesus is Lord". & Though you were free to believe what you wanted, you weren't free to try & proselytize Roman citizens.

So these men whip up the mob; the authorities presume these guys aren't Roman citizens & swiftly subject them to being caned. It was illegal to do this to Roman citizens, but non-citizens had virtually no civil rights, they were just subjected to the whims of the mob & magistrates.

& We note that they laid "many stripes" on them. Under Jewish law, there was a limit to how many stripes you could lay on a man (40). Roman law had no such limit. So by the time we're reading of "many", I think it's safe to say it was plenty more than 40. These men were severely beaten... Paul would later write of his life, "*...in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently...*"<sup>8</sup> & much more beyond that, he records that he was beaten 3xs w/rods (this is the only one we have). He received 39 lashes w/a whip 5xs. Shipwrecked 3xs, stoned & left for dead... I mean Paul knew what it was like to suffer for the sake of the gospel...

Here, they brutally beat them, publicly humiliated them, then placed them in maximum security conditions (in the inner prison w/their feet fastened in stocks).  
"Welcome to Europe!"

I think if I were Silas I might be prone to question Paul's vision, "Bro, are you sure it wasn't those fish tacos because this wasn't how I was envisioning God's will!" Question; how do you envision the "will of God" for your life? Primrose, prosperous, only problem free paths? Or is it possible that God can not only *refine* us, but *find* others through trials in our lives?

Vs 25

Is it just me, or is this incredible? Listen, It's one thing to praise God when the lights are dim, the environment is safe, the climate is comfortable... What would it take to keep you from giving God praise? How many of us can go from praising to complaining by simply sitting behind someone who doesn't realize the red light turned green? 😊

What do you do when you've been unjustly beaten to a bloody mess, drug down into a dirty, filthy, stench filled, musty infection ready environment & had your feet fastened in stocks? Do you know what Paul & Silas do? They sing & give God praise... Think about that.

This is the kind of individual who doesn't equate the love/grace of God w/circumstantial favor or material wealth or creature comforts. This is the kind of person that says in their heart, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." The kind of person that can say, "God demonstrated His own love toward me, not through giving me life on ez street, but in that while I was still a sinner, Christ was beaten, Christ was bloodied, Christ died for me..."

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Co 11:23]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

For no crime of His own. No servant is above his master... They probably couldn't sleep because of the pain & discomfort so they decided to focus on the goodness of God rather than the horrific conditions of their circumstances.

Notice the prisoners were listening to them... Guys; prayer/praise are powerful weapons. The prisoners (& jailer for that matter) were used to hearing men curse, complain, cry out in pain; but giving God praise? "You got my attention."

Paul & Silas were men who truly believed that God was in control, that He loved them, that He had a plan *for* them & they lived w/a view toward the *eternal*. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he said, "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"<sup>9</sup> The idea being that no matter how bad it gets in this life, it's temporary; & the glory God is preparing through it is forever...

### Vs 26-30

Ladies and Gentlemen; this scene was just as intense as you think it was. Can you imagine this!? These guys are praising God; everyone is listening, the earth starts shaking; chains fall off, doors fly open... why didn't everyone run for it? I'm telling you the fear of God was on those pagan prisoners. This was something supernatural & they knew it... Last time I checked; earthquakes didn't cause shackles & chains to fall off.

Now; if I were *Paul & Silas*, I might be prone to think that like Peter, this was a Divine prison break! But Paul realized this was about *his* freedom, it was about someone else's... Remember the murderer we spoke of as our time began? Satan was about to drag a man's soul down to hell & Paul intervened.

The keeper of the prison was about to commit suicide when Paul shouted, "We're all still here, do yourself no harm!" In that day, if you were responsible for a prisoner(s) & one or more escaped, whatever their sentence was, it would be imposed upon you! Knowing this, he thought that rather than go through the public shame/humility of being put to death, he'd just do it himself. Paul knowing all that yelled out so as to stop him...

Now; when you're on the brink of death, what do you think is going through a man's mind? He was freaking out, afraid, uncertain of what would happen & when he heard Paul assure him they were all there; it's like someone just saved him from falling off a cliff...

<sup>9</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [2 Co 4:17-18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& There's something poetic about the fact that he called for a light; & he ran in, & this man (maybe the one who'd just beat them hours before) falls trembling before them & says, "Sirs (note the humility), what must I do to be saved?" Incredible. Now God resist the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

You might note that it wasn't the physical health, or prosperity of these 2 that led this man to ask how he could be saved. It was observing how they handled themselves in the worst possible condition of their lives. It's not typically the blessing that draws others to want what you have in Christ. It's seeing how you handle crisis, trials, tough times. They're w/out hope being w/out God in the world. But somehow you have hope, peace & even praise in an otherwise "hopeless" situation... I want some of that. This is how God wants our lives to be. Like magnets drawing people to Jesus.

### Vs 31-32

They spoke the gospel to him, & his household, they believed & were saved. "What must I do to be saved?" It's not about what *you do*, it's about what Jesus *as done*. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you *will be saved*. It's by grace alone, through faith alone.

Some people struggle w/the fact that Paul didn't tell him to repent. It's 2 sides of the same coin. Do you remember when Jesus was ministering to the multitudes & they asked Him what they must do to work the works of God? (Same concept, what do I have to do to be right in the sight of God?) Jesus said, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.*"<sup>10</sup> Understand that Paul wasn't saying, "Well, give an intellectual assent to a historical figure named Jesus who once walked the earth." The word "believe" means to "trust *in*, to rely *on* & cling *to*" he's being told to rely entirely on the work of J.C. for the salvation of his soul.

Btw, when Paul told him that his household would be saved, he wasn't saying that this guy could believe & they'd be saved (by proxy). He was saying that J.C. would not only save him should he believe, but that should his family believe, He'd save them as well. For *whoever* calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (that's the idea).

Vs 32 informs us that Paul/Silas shared the message of the gospel w/him & his family, now look at Vs 33.

### Vs 33-34

You show me your faith w/out your works, I'll show you my faith *by* my works. Ladies & gentlemen, this is a changed man.

<sup>10</sup> [The New King James Version](#), (1982). [Jn 6:29]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He went from beating them to bathing them, washing them, feeding them. From hurting them, to healing them. The fruit of repentance immediately evident. **They were baptized that very night & he went from suicidal fear to abounding joy in a matter of minutes. But this is one evidence of true repentance, he sought to bring healing to those he'd previously wounded... & Notice they received it. They weren't all, "Nope, the damage is done... it's too late, it is what it is." They allowed him to wash the wounds, so important (on both sides).**

But a change of heart will always bring a change of actions, a change of deeds. What I believe determines how I behave. Those prison doors flew open that night, *not* to free Paul & Silas; but so that this man & his family (no doubt other prisoners) might be set free in Jesus.

**Vs 35-36**

Evidently, they returned to the prison & awaited the judgment. The prison warden comes in & says, "Great news guys, God is good! They said you're free to go!"

**Vs 37-39**

**They'd refused to recognize their rights before & now Paul pulls out the "Roman citizen" card. Remember when I told you it was illegal to beat a Roman like that? & As for why Paul didn't mention this before, we have no idea. Perhaps he never had the chance, the mob mentality had taken over & what was done was done. Truth is, sometimes God may ask us to lay down our rights for the sake of another (in this case it made for the salvation of this jailer & his family).**

But Paul wasn't going to "sneak out of town" & just let this blow over. Why? Was he being vindictive? No. Had they just kind of left w/their tail between their legs it would've put some weird cloud of suspicion over all the work they'd done there. It was important to him to leave behind a strong witness & a good testimony for the church now in Philippi.

**Vs 40**

**They encouraged the new believers (each reached in very different ways), let them know that everything was above board & then they left. Notice "they". Evidently Luke stayed to minister, perhaps he lived there, we don't know. But he stayed behind & the rest of them moved on... God took what the enemy meant for evil & used it for good; it's what He does. The spiritual war set before them an open door & people were saved. Let's pray & seek God for the same discerning heart that might see the opportunities that God gives us to share His love w/those around us who are w/out hope, being w/out Him in the world.**



**Prayer Points:**

God; we're asking that You help us to not be so self-centered that we don't see the open doors You set before us. That we seize opportunities to give You praise & point others to You. That we remember Your love was demonstrated at the cross. Thank You for Your grace, for Your mercy. May we in turn be merciful to others, washing wounds, healing hearts for the glory of Your name.

Sometimes God will open a heart through a gentle word, other times it takes seismic activity, but He loves us enough to "shake us up" if it'll open our heart to Him. If God's opening your heart to Him even now, believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.