

A Slave Girl and a Jailer

- Acts 16:16-34
- I remember a man we met years ago when he came to speak at Antioch. His name was Sandy, and he is with the Lord now. But he was a man who loved Jesus and believed completely in the power of the Holy Spirit and walked in that power in many ways. When he was in town he noticed a house in Graham (we were meeting in the ND bldg. on Harden St) that sported a sign saying, "Madame So-n-So, Fortune Teller." Sandy was walking and praying, as he often did, and when he came to that house, he stopped and prayed in front of it. He prayed that God would shut down the business completely and make it impossible for a spirit of divination to be at work there ever again. Well, do you know, that a few months after Sandy prayed that the fortune-teller would go out of business, she did? And then a few months after that, the house was torn down or moved; I don't remember which. (Corollary: the impression that made on a young boy named Micah...)
- Paul and Silas are in Philippi, and as we saw last week, the Lord is there with them. He has already opened the heart of a businesswoman named Lydia, and she and her household are the founding family of the church in Philippi. Today, we are going to see God add two more members to the first European church. The first is a slave girl who is possessed of a spirit of divination. The second is a man who works as a jailer in the local prison.
- **The slave girl**
- Paul and Silas are on their way to a prayer meeting when they meet her. Or, she meets them. And is yelling out, "These men are servants of the most high God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." For days. You have to wonder where her owners are this whole time. She is the money-maker. Her demonic power enables her to tell people's future, or at least to convince them that she is telling them the future, and her owners are making a killing off of her. So, why are they not intervening? I can think of one good reason: God has plans for her. She is yelling, the truth about Paul and Silas, so what would make Paul annoyed? Well, the logical answer is that this demonic evangelism is becoming associated in the minds of the people with the Gospel, and Paul does not want that. The other answer is, God has plans for this girl.
- When Paul commands the spirit to come out of her, that's when the trouble starts. Because not only did he exorcise her demon, he also shut down the business of fortune-telling. She had brought her owners MUCH gain. Follow the money. When there is corruption at the highest levels of government, follow the money. When there is a fistfight on Ireland St between two people you've never heard of, follow the money. When there is a church fight and one faction changes the locks on the door so the other faction can't get in anymore, follow the money. Even when it's about power, you can almost always follow the money that the power gives access to.
- Why did the owners not show up when all of this started with Paul, and before the slave girl had lost her demonic power? Because God loved a slave girl and had plans for her. I know the text doesn't tell us that she became a Christian. But since her story comes right between Lydia's and the Philippian jailers, I think we are quite safe in assuming that she was not only delivered from, but that she was delivered to! Especially since Paul's motto, as we have talked about, was 1 Cor. 9:19: "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." It would make no sense for Paul to cast the demon out of this poor girl and then leave her house swept clean so that 7 demons worse than the one she had could move in. I think what happened was they led her to faith in Christ and then she went with them to the prayer meeting. The next thing you know, the owners have heard about it, confirmed the truth, that she doesn't have the spirit of divination anymore, go to the prayer meeting (down by the riverside?), and there they seize Paul and Silas and drag them before the rulers.
- Notice the language here and remember that Jesus told His disciples they would be sent out as sheep among wolves, and that they (WE!) would be delivered to courts and flogged in the

synagogues, and “dragged before governors and kings for My sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.” (Matt. 10:16-18) Look at the progression, beginning in verse 19. They were seized by the owners. Dragged to the marketplace. Accused of being Jewish, first. (“These men are Jews.”) TODAY, around the world, it starts with: “These people are Christians.” They made a religious claim (“advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans.”) And that’s all it took. The two missionaries were attacked by the whole crowd in a frenzy and the next thing you know, they were beaten with rods. Roman magistrates had men who worked for them called lictors. Lictors were men, I would imagine BIG men, who carried with them a bundle of rods and an axe, the Roman symbols of law and order. With these they administered corporal punishment, or if needed, capital punishment. It was a severe beating, one that left Paul and Silas bloodied and broken. On top of that, they were put in prison. Not the outer prison, where men could move about freely and receive guests and be fed. They were thrown into the inner prison, and their feet were put in stocks. It was a dark place where the most vile and dangerous were kept. The stocks would be torture to bodies that were already mangled. Why did this happen? How could God allow His servants to suffer such inhumanity? Why didn’t Paul tell them before the beating that he was a Roman citizen? That would have stopped the whole thing! Two reasons: One, he may not have been able to because of the frenzy of the crowd; it happened fast. Two, all of this happened, the seizing, the dragging, the accusing, the beating...because God loved a Philippian jailer and had plans for him.

- **The Philippian jailer**

- We don’t know much about this man. Tradition says that he was probably a retired Roman soldier. Too old to fight with the Roman army, but not too old to work in the local prison. Comfortable with using violence when necessary, but happy when he can make it through a night without a fight. He has finished processing the two newest prisoners, shoved them in their cell, locked them down, and hoping the rest of the night shift will be uneventful. Heh-heh. He is asleep, maybe hearing singing in his dreams.
- No matter what the men in this prison have seen in lifetimes of crime, there is nothing that could have ever prepared them for what they are about to see and hear. Because on this night, at midnight, the prisoners hear a sound they have never heard before in a prison. These two new guys must be delirious with pain. They are praying out loud. Then they are singing out loud. Singing hymns. Instead of what the prisoners normally hear in the inner prison, vile cursing and screaming and rage, they hear men singing praises to God. And the entire prison is listening! They are shocked into silence. They know what comes out of them when they are hurting, and this is not anything like that. I’ve told you the story before but it bears repeating, about the time when I was speaking to a bunch of college students and I asked for a volunteer to come and help me. A young lady came up, let’s call her Meghan, and I asked her to hold a cup of water that I had there that was very full. To the brim. She does, and I keep talking and gesture and bump her hand and water spills out on the floor. “Why did water come out of that cup just now, Meghan?” I asked. She laughed and said, “Because you bumped my hand.” Oh, so it’s my fault, Meghan? Right now my little children are at home praying for me as I speak here tonight, “Lord, help Daddy to have enough water while he’s speaking,” but it’s my fault that a third of the cup is now on the floor? No, why did water come out of that cup just now, Meghan? She looked a little nervous, but said, “Well, it was pretty full, and you know when a cup is full and gets hit...” So you’re using science on me now, Meghan? No, that’s not it, either. Why did water come out of that cup and make a mess on the floor just now, Meghan. She kinda’ smiled and shook her head and said, “I don’t know.” Let’s give her a hand; you did great, Meghan. You want to know why water came out of that cup just now? It’s because water was IN the cup! So we need to ask the question, what comes out of ME when I get bumped?
- As the inmates were listening to these two men give praise to God, the second greatest surprise of the night happened. An earthquake. It wasn’t that unusual in that part of the world, but what WAS unusual was that this earthquake opened up the prison. Verse 26, “All the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.” Then the third greatest surprise of the night happened. Not one prisoner escaped. They were all free, still shackled, but they could have gotten out of there, but no

one did. Not one. Two questions: 1- Why did God cause the earthquake that opened the prison doors and set the prisoners free? 2- Why did all the prisoners stay right there when the doors were opened? Same answer to both questions: because God loved a Philippian jailer and had plans for him. He knew that their escape, any of them would mean his life. Another irony. Their escape would have cost the jailer his life. But Jesus' life paid for his escape.

- The jailer runs and falls down before Paul and Silas and asks that question that we all long to hear our lost loved ones ask: "What must I do to be saved?" And the answer is so simple: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." What is the most powerful thing any of us can do? Believe in the Lord Jesus. What is the greatest way to grow in your faith? Believe in the Lord Jesus. What is the best way to avoid sin and keep your heart pure? Believe in the Lord Jesus. What is the best way to make a difference in the world? Believe in the Lord Jesus. What is the best way to lay up treasures in heaven? Believe in the Lord Jesus. What is the best way to find fulfillment and success and significance in this life? Believe in the Lord Jesus! What is the best way to find courage when you are feeling defeated? Believe in the Lord Jesus!
- During World War I, a British commander was preparing to lead his soldiers back to battle. They'd been on furlough, and it was a cold, rainy, muddy day. Their shoulders sagged because they knew what lay ahead of them: mud, blood, possible death. Nobody talked, nobody sang. It was a heavy time.
"As they marched along, the commander looked into a bombed-out church. Back in the church he saw the figure of Christ on the cross. At that moment, something happened to the commander. He remembered the One who suffered, died, and rose again. There was victory, and there was triumph. "As the troops marched along, he shouted out, 'Eyes right, march!' Every eye turned to the right, and as the soldiers marched by, they saw Christ on the cross. Something happened to that company of men. Suddenly they saw triumph after suffering, and they took courage. With shoulders straightened, they began to smile as they went.
- Believe in the Lord Jesus!