

Gospel for all

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 March 2025

Preacher: John Ross

[0 : 00] A very good morning to you from me, as it was from him. One of the joys of coming to church is coffee at the end.

Most of us live for this, really. We die for it sometimes. Because when you have coffee, or if you have to have the other stuff, that as well, when you have all that kind of drink, you don't just drink it on your own.

You talk to people. And the people you meet that you talk to are from various walks of life. People from different backgrounds. People from different jobs. Different ages.

Different types of people. You see, the church is not merely for similar kinds of people. The church ought to reflect the community in which it is placed.

So have a look here at the book of Acts. Paul has arrived at Philippi. And that's certainly what we see, that the gospel is for everybody in the city.

[1 : 00] The gospel arrives here in Europe. This is the first time the gospel has moved out of Asia and across to Europe.

There are three different characters that Luke is highlighting. Luke is the writer. That Luke is highlighting for us here. First of all, the person you meet is wealthy Lydia.

You get that from 11 to 15. Wealthy Lydia, who runs a prayer group. On the Sabbath, verse 13, we went outside the city gates of 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. That means she's wealthy because purple cloth was used for the rich.

She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. And when she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house.

[2 : 07] And she persuaded us. And in fact, we think that's where the church probably met at the end. If you go down to verse 40, when Paul and Silas had come out of prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them.

And then they left. Now, this prayer group down by the side of the river tells us something very significant. There's no synagogue in the city. There's not enough Jews.

You need 10 Jewish men to make up a congregation. There was no synagogue. This is a Roman outpost. If there was a synagogue, Paul would have gone there because that's his normal procedure.

But because the minimum isn't met, Lydia runs a prayer group down by the riverside. And through Paul's preaching, she is thoroughly converted to the Lord Jesus and she is baptised.

Notice the phrase in verse 14, the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

[3 : 13] That would be the normal method that God uses to bring people to Christ. We respond to his word. We hear his word taught. We study his word.

We read it. And illumination takes place. The light of Jesus Christ shines into our eyes and we see. We usually see two things. What a wretched person I am and what a wonderful person the Lord Jesus is.

So this lady, this wealthy lady, is converted, as we say. She finds Christ. The Lord's opened her heart. She's baptised. The second person we meet is down in verse 16.

There they are going to the place of prayer again. And this time at verse 16, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit. You'll see it's a moment, it's an evil spirit, by which she predicted the future.

She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us shouting, these men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved.

[4 : 15] She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her.

At that moment, the spirit left her. When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, these men are Jews and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.

And the crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods and after they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. So they end up in prison all because of this slave girl, this fortune teller.

[5 : 21] Now she's quite a contrast, isn't she, to Lydia, wealthy Lydia, and the fortune teller. And she is somewhat spiritual like Lydia was. Lydia went to a place of prayer and gathered the women to pray.

She is somewhat spiritual in an evil sense. She has a demon within her. And she is able to say something about the men that are coming into the town. Look at verse 17.

These men, she says, are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved. That is absolutely true, isn't it?

They are servants of the Most High God. They are telling you the way to be rescued, to be saved. That is true. But it clearly annoyed Paul. She keeps it up for several days and finally in verse 18, Paul becomes so annoyed, he turned around and said to the spirit, now why is Paul annoyed?

Why did he have to cast out this evil spirit? Why is he not happy with the truth being told? After all, the truth is the truth, isn't it? Whoever it's said by. Why doesn't Paul allow her to carry on saying it?

[6 : 31] It seems that it's clear that Paul does not want the truth to come from an evil source. It is God's people who are to confess Christ, not demons.

So Paul rebukes the demon and casts it out. Verse 18. She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her.

And at that moment, the spirit left her. Now, interestingly enough, we don't know if this lady turned to the Lord Jesus in repentance of faith. We just know that she's now got no evil spirit within her. I'm going to assume that she probably started to follow the gospel and followed Paul and Silas. But now she's no longer under demon influence.

She's in trouble with her job. She can't tell fortunes anymore. She's an economic drain on her masters. Money talks, even in the first century.

[7 : 34] And that gets Paul and Silas into serious, serious trouble. Doesn't it, at 19? When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

They brought them before the magistrates and said, these men are Jews and are throwing our city into uproar, advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.

So they were shackled in jail. And you may well think that as Paul and Silas get put in jail, the story is all over. The gospel has been silenced, the magistrates, along with the crowds, have won and the jailers got the key.

Roman order has been restored and the gospel is imprisoned. But if you look with your eye at the text, there is one more story to tell and it's the longest section of all.

It's the jailer, the Philippian jailer. He's the third person, I suggest, who becomes a follower of Jesus. But like the slave girl, he's not named. So if Lydia was wealthy and was upper class and the slave girl may be lower class, a social outcast, really, the jailer is a sort of middle man.

[8 : 55] Probably an ex-military man, a government worker and he's in charge of the jail. It's a serious job to be in charge of a Roman jail because if you lose somebody, you lose your life as well.

Look at verse 25. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once, all the prison doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose.

The jailer woke up and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, don't harm yourself, we are all here.

The jailer called for light. He rushed in and trembling before Paul and Silas, he then brought them out and asked them, sirs, what must I do to be saved? The two women are both spiritually minded people.

[10:02] One with God and one with the evil spirit. And they, I think, have both come to follow Christ by hearing the truth explained to them. But the jailer is different.

It doesn't seem he comes to faith in Christ by words, more by actions. Yes, he may have heard the singing in the prison.

He may have heard their prayers, which would have been said out loud. But he is overwhelmed by the one thing that Paul and Silas have kept all the prisoners together. Nobody's escaped.

So he stops trying to kill himself and he falls trembling at their feet and he's clearly, clearly troubled. This is the prison at Philippi, which you can see today.

That's what it looks like today, just a sort of cave in the rocks. But we're very, very grateful for the photographer who sent me this photograph inside. So this is a picture inside.

[11:02] There they are with the prison jailer holding lights, coming in with lights, trembling, falling at the feet. There are the men in the stocks explaining to him that everybody's safe inside.

This man is a most remarkable man. He's very, very troubled and he was about to commit suicide. But, after his conversation with Paul and Silas, he turns around and becomes a very, very different person.

Jesus Christ becomes central in his life. Not himself, not the Roman state that he works for, but Jesus becomes his Lord. It's a remarkable, remarkable turnaround.

And at the end, he is the most gracious and kind fellow you could imagine. Now, this is the longest story here that Luke has written up for us at Philippi.

It explains the gospel in greater detail than the other two. And Luke, remember, is writing for his friend Theophilus. Theophilus, he wants to show, is learning the gospel and he wants to show what Jesus has been doing after Jesus has risen through the apostles all the way through the world.

[12:20] Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth. We're coming towards Europe. It's the ends of the earth, by the way, is Europe. Jesus is continuing his work.

He wants to write it up for his friend Theophilus. He's saying God, through the gospel, turns people and situations around all sorts of people. Wealthy people, working class people, even ex-military people, government officials.

The gospel is for everybody. Some people, like Lydia, are prepared souls. The Lord just needs to open her heart. Others are overtaken by evil, like the slave girl.

And others are just hard-hearted people. Someone called the jailer a calloused man. But God can open anybody's heart. And that's a lesson to us, isn't it?

Don't write anybody off. Don't give up. Everyone can hear about Christ. God has his people in every place. But isn't the story highlighted by the key question the man asks?

[13:26] Don't you think that's right? This is the key question that he asks. What must I do to be saved? Can you see that? At 29? He calls them sirs.

He's very respectful. What must I do to be saved? Now this jailer is trapped. He is trapped between God and his bosses.

We understand that if he loses the prisoners, he will lose his life under Roman law. But he might also feel he'd be damned by God. So how can he be saved?

And what did he mean by being saved? You see, today, it's a funny word, isn't it? To be saved or savings. We think that savings are money you keep in a bank account somewhere for a rainy day. Or we use the word of a goalkeeper who stops the ball going in there. He saved the goal! That's how we use the word saved today, don't we? But saving is a theological word.

[14:24] It means to be rescued and specifically to be rescued from going to hell. It is to find what the Bible would call salvation.

It's a way out from damnation. Now, interestingly enough, the slave girl has used that word as she says that Paul and Silas are proclaiming the way to be saved.

Did you see that at verse 17? They were proclaiming the way to be saved at 17. So, presumably, she understood or the demon understood it as a word of eternal rescue.

Maybe that's how the jailer used it too. Maybe he is asking to be rescued by the living God. And it's certainly true that Paul and Silas were divine agents of some sort to bring the message of rescue, the message of salvation.

So, he falls trembling at their feet, which means he has huge respect for them and his life has been saved in one sense. But what must I do to be saved is probably the most important question that anybody could ever ask, isn't it?

[15 : 37] I mean, this man has realised that something, something is terribly, terribly wrong. He can't rescue himself. He just doesn't have the resources.

So, recognising his inadequacy, he cries out, what must I do to be rescued, to be saved? In other words, what must I do to be rescued from the consequences of eternal damnation?

The jailer must come to terms with being answerable to God as well as answerable to his Roman leaders. indeed, all of us need to ask the question, don't we?

What must I do to be rescued? Lydia and the slave girl were changed by what they heard. The apostles spoke to Lydia. Paul spoke to the evil spirit.

But for the jailer, the only words he would have heard were the songs they were singing and their prayers. Some think he might have heard them speaking publicly elsewhere.

[16 : 43] I personally think he was looking after the prisoners in the jail. He wasn't wandering around the town. But some think he might have heard from other sources. I want to suggest that what impresses this man more than anything else is the way that Paul assures them that nobody has escaped.

Paul and Silas have rounded up all the prisoners. We're all here. And they don't mean we're all here mentally. They mean we're all physically here. We're all here. We're all here.

There's no need to kill yourself. It's all right. So the apostles' actions of rounding everybody up had caused him to ask the question. Isn't that one of the most important questions?

What must I do to be saved? You see in our culture we're often shaken by our troubles. Whether it's the fire at Heathrow and you couldn't get off on Friday to fly somewhere.

Or whether it's a family breakup. Or whether it's a life-threatening illness you're told about. Or loss of job when you're at the top of your career. It's only then that we might ask the question about our eternal security in our culture.

[17 : 54] What must I do to be saved? We'll rarely ask the question while we're in control of our lives and all is ticking over and going well. It's when we're shaken. It's when we feel we're losing it.

That's when our soul tends to get troubled. Paul's answer is simplicity itself. It's a brilliant answer. Look at it. Look at it. It's there in verse 31.

Just look at his answer. It's so superb. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. You and all your household. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

You and all your household. In other words, trust Jesus. Trust Jesus. This is the good news. This is the gospel that Jesus came to bring.

The gospel that Jesus died and rose again. And we're to believe in him. That's how we're eternally rescued. To believe means to trust, doesn't it? It means to put your faith in something.

[18 : 57] We call it saving faith. Rescuing faith. And the object of our faith, it's not the faith that saves us, it's the object of our faith that saves us, it's the Lord Jesus. And the word Jesus itself means saviour, the one who saves.

And the word Lord means the one who is master, ruler. So Paul is calling on this Roman citizen to put his trust wholeheartedly in the man we call Jesus the Christ.

Faith alone in Christ alone. This is the gospel. Paul and his team then enlarge on the good news of God's actions in Jesus. They explain the gospel to him now.

Look at 32. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds.

Then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set the meal before them and was filled with joy because he had come to leave in God. He and his whole household.

[20 : 00] So they enlarge on the good news of God's actions in Jesus. Yes, the gospel might be quite simple. It might just be believe in the Lord Jesus.

That's true. But that needs unpacking. And our man and his household need instruction, discipling, learning to follow Jesus. And Bible studies can be held late into the night.

Understanding the nature of humanity, seeing how Jesus Christ can redeem us, what the cross and resurrection does. I still read gospel stories.

There's a book just out by Andrew Wilson called Gospel Stories. It's fabulous. Just produced.

Superbly written. I need to read the gospel time and time and time and time again.

All the time. This man is feeding his soul with the gospel and it's changing him. You see, in order to be baptized, he must have understood that he was now a new person in Christ.

[21 : 02] That the old has gone and the new has come. It's very humbling, you know, to be plunged into a tank of water. You would have to know that your sins had made you dirty and indeed that the washing that Jesus gives you through his death is the only one possible.

You would have to identify yourself as a follower to do something as ridiculous as getting soaking wet in public that you're following a rescuing Lord. So notice the steps that this man has taken.

He's heard the gospel. It's changed his heart. At that hour of the night, he's baptized and he takes them to his house and they have either very late supper or very early breakfast and he's filled with joy because he's come to believe in God and so is his whole household with him.

See, the man has asked the right questions. The man has asked what must I do to be saved? The man has taken on board the right answer. He's believed in the Lord Jesus and he's been rescued from eternal judgment.

He's demonstrated that he's a new man in Christ by carrying out the apostles, by caring for the apostles' needs and above all by being baptized.

[22 : 27] So I think it's good to ask ourselves the questions, are we clear on these things? Is our trust in Christ and Christ alone? If so, do we demonstrate our love and compassion for others and do we confess our faith in believers' baptism?

So they're the three stories of the three characters at Philippi. Isn't the lesson to take home today these three were turned around?

That's what the gospel is, it turns you around. I should turn around. See, at Philippi, all three, the wealthy Lydia, the female slave, the governor of the jail, all from different backgrounds, all from different statuses in life, all different people turned around.

Lydia was already religious, the fortune teller believed in spiritual forces and the jailer was, well, what can we call him? A hardened ex-soldier maybe? A civil servant? Although how civil he was before, we don't know.

But when he was converted, he showed great compassion and hospitality to the prisoners. All three were saved, I suggest. Although, as I say, I'm not so sure about the middle girl. We aren't told about her, but I'm making a guess there.

[23 : 41] They're turned around, they're changed, and they form the core of this new church in verse 40 that meets in Lydia's house. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them, and then they left.

Here's a true church at Philippi. It's made up of people from a variety of backgrounds who have one thing in common. They have each been thoroughly rescued, thoroughly saved, they've been turned around by Jesus Christ, into whose hands they have placed their lives.

Jesus now controls their thinking and their living. I don't want to go into the story of Paul appealing and arguing with the magistrates that he was a Roman citizen himself, and they shouldn't have done this to him, but leave that aside.

The questions we're left with is, where are we this morning? Have we been rescued? Does this describe us? Who are we trusting? Myself?

Yourself? Ourselves? Guesswork about the future? Maybe your wealth? Maybe your status? Maybe your job? Maybe your learning? Or Jesus the Saviour?

[24 : 57] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for changing the lives of these three very different people. And you've changed many of our lives too, and we want to continue to ask you to shape us to be more like the Lord Jesus.

Please do that, we ask. And we ask that his salvation, his rescuing work, might have a deep effect in each of us. Humble us. Please show us our selfish nature.

Please cause us to turn to the Lord Jesus regularly. Please help us to encourage our friends to do the same, and family, to truly believe in him, such that we are completely rescued from an eternal hell.

We praise you for the gospel. We thank you for the friends who told us about Jesus, and we pray that we might be friends to many, many others in the days and months to come. For we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Thank you.