

Acts 16:16–40

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Date: 27 May 2018

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[0 : 00] It's a great pleasure to be able to open the Word of the Lord for His people. It's an even greater pleasure when you get to do it for your own church family. I also acknowledge that it's a great responsibility, so let me open in a word of prayer.

Our Heavenly Father, we are here to hear from you today. We want to hear you speak, and so we ask that your Holy Spirit come down and speak through me and work in the hearts and minds of each person that's here today that we may hear your voice.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. We find ourselves in about the tenth month of our study in Acts.

I hope you're not getting tired of it because the narrative goes on, and it is an exciting narrative. In our story throughout Acts, we see that God is at work in the world. The Holy Spirit is on the move from city to city.

The gospel takes root in people's hearts and wins over entire households at a time. The church is established in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, in all the ends of the earth, in all nations.

[1 : 05] It's an exciting story that is historically grounded and tells of eternal and cosmic events. On the surface, it might look repetitious as we read about city after city where the church takes root, but each city has its own story as how it came into being.

If I were to ask each one of you how you came to know that Jesus is Lord, your stories would all be different, and each one of your stories would show off God's power and wonderful creativity in a different way, and we see the same creativity demonstrated in the church of Acts.

Our narrative today focuses on Philippi, one of those many cities that we hear about. We were introduced to it last week, and it started when Paul and Silas visited a place where God-fearing women gathered to pray, and today it ends with the birth of a new church in that region.

Our story today will show us that when the message of salvation in Christ is proclaimed, some will reject salvation, others will embrace salvation, but no matter how you respond, the church will continue to grow.

Our text breaks down into two primary sections. The salvation is rejected in verses 16 through 24, and salvation is embraced in verses 25 through 40. So let's take a look at how the message of salvation is rejected or ignored or somehow confounded in these first verses.

[2 : 32] Paul and Silas encountered a spirit of divination when they went to the place of prayer. And in verse 18, it tells us that they went there many days, day after day, and each day they were met by a slave girl that was possessed by the spirit of divination.

The girl was able to tell people's fortunes or prophesize or somehow foretell their future. Each day she would accurately prophesy the truth about Paul and Silas, as we read in verse 17.

And it says, These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. The spirit was sowing confusion among the people about the message of salvation.

On the one hand, it spoke truth about Paul and Silas and their message. But on the other hand, they were spirits and actively engaged in divination, which goes against God's law.

He was playing with both sides and confusing the crowd about the message of salvation. In verse 18, it tells us that Paul had enough and became greatly annoyed.

[3 : 35] And he invoked the name of Jesus Christ, who has the power and authority over all spiritual beings. And Paul commanded the spirit to leave the slave girl, and it obeyed. Paul was probably also disturbed that the slave girl was being taken advantage of by her owners.

They didn't seem to care that she was possessed. They weren't concerned for her well-being. In fact, they liked the way things were because they were making good money off of her because of the spirit.

When Paul drove out the spirit, the girl was set free from the spirit. But she lost her gift and was of no use to the owners, and they were enraged. We have to assume that the slave owners actually heard Paul and Silas' teaching about the way of salvation in the name of the most high God, as they said.

But they were uninterested in the message of salvation because money was more important to them than salvation. So they rejected the message of salvation altogether.

In their rage, in verse 19, it tells us that they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And there they made two false claims against Paul and Silas in verses 20 and 21.

[4 : 47] These men are Jews. Well, that part was true. They are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice. They make no mention that Paul freed the girl from the spirit, which led to the loss of income.

They knew how to manipulate the magistrates and the crowd into action. So what about these two statements enraged the crowd and caused the magistrates to have Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into jail, as we read in verses 22 and 23?

We need to understand a little bit more about the city of Philippi. Philippi was a leading city in the Roman colony that wielded considerable power and influence in the region, and it came with special privileges for its citizens.

They enjoyed the elevated status in the Roman Empire. All this leads to some sort of pride of being. The magistrates were leaders in this privileged city and exercised much power and received considerable honor, and neither the crowd nor the magistrates wanted to jeopardize this special status in the Roman Empire.

The two charges got at the heart of Roman pride. They charged Paul and Silas as Jews, who were easy targets because they were minorities in the city, and had strange beliefs about their one god, who didn't really play nice with the plurality of Roman gods, and they weren't inclined to worship the Roman emperor.

[6 : 11] In short, they were a threat to the status quo of the Roman and Roman customs. The magistrates recognized that they needed to calm the crowd down and keep peace in the city.

They needed to squelch any sort of religious challenge to the Roman way, and above all, they needed to do these things so their own position and status would not be jeopardized by this message of salvation that Paul and Silas were teaching.

So the magistrates acted swiftly in protecting their collective interests and had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into jail. Now, the way the slave owners and the magistrates responded to the message of salvation kind of reminds me of how my dog Coco responds to me when she's out in the yard and I call her, but if there's a squirrel in the yard, forget about it.

She knows I'm calling her because I could see her ear go like that, but she's completely uninterested in anything I have to say at that time. She's so focused in on that squirrel, trying to figure out how to get to the tree before that squirrel gets to that tree, and she wants to cut them off and maybe even catch that squirrel.

Now, she has an idea that I'm there and that I might want something from her, but she's too focused on the squirrel to even care to find out what I want from her. As slave owners and the magistrates were aware on the periphery that Paul and Silas were teaching something that they should maybe pay attention to, that they were too locked in on the loss of income or a threat to their power and status that they paid no attention to the message in any way.

[7 : 43] How many of us are locked in on some worry or concern or need or bad habit or self-destructive thoughts or academic and professional goals that we don't pay attention to the message of salvation that calls for our response?

We may sense that something is bigger than us is out there on our periphery, but we're too distracted by things that appear to be more important than the message of salvation. We need God to shake us out of our current desires.

We need the Holy Spirit to redirect our focus and open our hearts like He did for Lydia so that we can embrace the message of salvation. Salvation was rejected in these first few verses.

In our next few verses, starting in verse 25, we see how salvation was embraced. It's fascinating to note in this text that what man intended for evil, God used for His own glory, for the salvation of the lost, and for the growth of His church.

The evil that the magistrates inflicted on Paul and Silas was used by them to bring glory to God as they embodied their salvation. So we read, So about midnight, when we find Paul and Silas in darkness, humiliated in pain, and instead of being focused on the reality of their hopeless situation, they were steadfast in their beliefs, strengthened by the joy of their salvation, and looked up to God and prayed and worshipped Him with joyful songs of praise that ricocheted off the prison walls while the other prisoners listened.

[9 : 14] Their faith was unshaken by their circumstances. What men intended for evil, God used for His own glory. Next, we will see what man intended for evil, God used for the salvation of His people.

If Paul and Silas hadn't suffered for the gospel and been thrown into jail, the Philippian jailer may never have embraced salvation. In the midst of their worship, we see God at work as He's literally shook the earth and broke open the jail doors, loosening the stocks, and the chains fell from the walls, setting the prisoners free.

The jailer was ripped out of his sleep by all the commotion and saw what was going on and was ready to throw himself on his sword. He knew that he would be severely punished for losing any of the prisoners, but probably even more so, he came from an honor and shame culture where it would have been too shameful to deal with the loss of the prisoners.

He failed at the only thing that he was actually supposed to be good at, and that is keeping prisoners in jail. But Paul called out to the jailer and stopped him and assured him that all the prisoners were still there.

In verse 29, the jailer called for light so he could confirm for himself, and when he noticed that they were all still there, he fell at the feet of Paul and Silas. Unlike the slave owners and the magistrates, the jailer sensed that something was going on here with these men and that he should probably pursue it and find out more about their message of salvation.

[10 : 40] So he demanded to know in verse 30, Sirs, what must I do? What must I do? Sorry. Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

In verse 31, we have the beautiful, simple answer. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. But wait, there's more.

The call to believe in the Lord was immediately followed up with further instruction, verse 32. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

We know that there is more content here. It wasn't just a ask Jesus into your heart and your good. There's actually content that needs to be believed here. And we know what that content was because Paul has been preaching that same content, the message of the gospel from city to city. They would have explained that man is sinful and condemned to death and is eternally separated from God and that a suitable sacrifice was required to bring about reconciliation between us and God and that a suitable sacrifice was required, sorry, and that Jesus offered himself up as the sacrifice.

[11 : 49] He died on the cross and he shed his blood on our behalf. And on the third day, he rose from the dead, overcoming the power of death so that he might give us everlasting life in the presence of our God.

And that is what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus. There must have been some mention of baptism because they were immediately baptized right then and there. The jailer and his household embraced the message of the salvation of the gospel and then they turned around and embodied the message of the gospel as we see in our next few verses.

First, the newly saved jailer was overflowing with joy. As he just received mercy from Jesus, he immediately showed mercy towards Paul and Silas and washed their wounds.

Second, he was quick to engage in hospitality as he opened his home to the prisoners and welcomed them into his space. Third, he was overflowing with generosity and set food before them, all sharing what God had given him.

And finally, he rejoiced along with his entire household. We had this beautiful image of a house brimming with mercy and hospitality and generosity and joy. It is no mistake that Luke mentions the jailer's household, his family, and his house up to five times in these couple of verses here.

[13 : 09] There's something about community and in the home and salvation that go hand in hand. Here we see that the jailer was just saved and was so excited and so filled with joy that he wanted to be hospitable.

There's something... At other times, we will see people who open their homes and provide a setting where people can then embrace the gospel message. You might not realize, but this idea of hospitality is part of the DNA of Holy Trinity Church.

We planned our activities so that ministry would take place in the homes around the city. Sure, we gather like this on Sunday to worship God, to hear his word, to encourage one another, but the rest of the week, you should find yourselves in someone's home or people should be gathered in your home.

It is in someone's home where the word of the Lord is opened on a regular basis. It is in someone's home that you should be welcomed to their table where you will enjoy a meal in joyful and sometimes awkward conversations.

It is in someone's home where you should practice in acts of mercy and acts of generosity. It is in someone's home where you should be encouraged, where you should be held accountable, where you should be able to cry on someone's shoulder, where you should rejoice in a community of believers.

[14:24] It is in someone's home where you should be able to come to embrace the message of salvation. When we do these things, we follow Jesus' examples. He shows us mercy, so we show others mercy.

He welcomes us to the table, so we welcome others to the table, and someday all those who believe will feast at his table for all eternity. There is great joy when the message of salvation is embraced and lived out, as we see with Paul and Silas and the jailer in his household.

If Paul and Silas hadn't suffered for the gospel and been thrown into jail, we would never have seen this beautiful narrative. But we do because what man intended for evil, God used for the salvation of the jailer and his household.

As we finish up our narrative, beginning in verse 35, we will see that what man intended for evil, God used for the growth of his church. In the morning, the magistrates sent the police to the prison to tell the jailer to set Paul and Silas free.

The jailer is happy to pass on the good news and tells them to go in peace. But Paul surprises us here when he says no. His more complete response is in verse 37.

[15:37] They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison, and do they now throw us out secretly? No. Let them come themselves and take us out.

Why does Paul respond like this? Paul was appealing to the Roman justice by calling their attention to the injustices that Paul and Silas had just endured at the hands of the Roman magistrates.

This message was brought back to the magistrates, and they found themselves in a tight spot. I could just see them now going, wait, what now? I thought you said they were Jewish. Now they're Roman?

They realized that they were too quick to act and too slow in working out the details. They never really stopped to find out if Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. On top of that, they realized that they didn't really follow the proper Roman laws.

They did kind of beat them and throw them in prison without any actual trial or guilty verdict, as Paul pointed out. They knew that other Roman citizens had their charters revoked because they mistreated Roman citizens.

[16:43] They realized they had to do some sort of damage control at this time. So they went down to the prison, just like Paul demanded. Our translation says that they apologized in verse 39, but the real nuance is less humbling and more like reasoning.

As the magistrates encouraged Paul and Silas to go ahead and leave now, now that the magistrates did show contrition by coming down and releasing them in person. So why is this important?

As a result of Paul pushing back on the magistrates, they may have been a little more hesitant to harass and persecute other gospel ministers that would come to town.

Or they may have been less inclined to persecute the young church that was taking root in the city of Philippi. This appeal to Roman justice provided just a little bit of elbow room for the church to grow with little resistance in the early vulnerable years.

What man intended for evil, God used for the growth of his church as Paul pushed back on the earthly principalities and their sense of Roman justice. In verse 40, we see that Paul made his point and then he left the prison.

[17 : 51] visited Lydia where it all began and saw the brethren and encouraged them all and departed. This was the beginning of a new church.

It started with Lydia, a woman, and her household and all who were saved there. And a Gentile, the Philippian jailer, and his household who were all saved.

And maybe a few other individuals, possibly the slave girl who was freed from the spirit. and they all embraced the message of salvation that Paul and Silas taught in Philippi.

When the message of salvation in Christ was proclaimed in Philippi, it demanded a response. In the first half of our text, we saw examples of those who rejected or ignored the message in some way.

While in the second half, our text, we see the jailer in his household embrace the message of salvation. While Paul and Silas embody the message of salvation, standing firm against earthly principalities so that the church could continue to grow.

[18 : 50] If you are here today and you have not embraced the message yet, you have heard it now. I encourage you to talk to one of us or maybe even your neighborhood group leader.

We'll be happy to help you along. If you're not ready today, that's fine. Come back next week. We'll still be in Acts. We'll be talking about another city, but we'll still be learning how God is at work.

If you have already embraced the message of salvation in Christ, then rejoice. And I realize that's not always that easy. I realize that sometimes we may be wavering in our belief and that the joy of our salvation has faded.

But maybe the joy of your salvation has faded because you are too distracted by your pursuit of financial stability. Maybe the joy of your salvation has faded because you live in fear of the future. Maybe the joy of your salvation has faded because you are too busy protecting the power that you wield or the recognition and status that you fought so hard for. Maybe the joy of your salvation has faded because you're too busy trying to survive the demanding, cruel world of high school or junior high.

[19 : 55] Maybe the joy of your salvation has faded because you have health issues that weigh heavily on you. Maybe the joy of your salvation has faded because you are living at odds with your spouse or someone in your family or someone even in this church.

I pray that you will rediscover the joy of your salvation and then when you do you will be free to act merciful towards others as Christ showed mercy towards you. That you will be generous with all that God has given you even as Christ was generous to the point of giving up his life that you might have eternal life.

That you will open your home and show hospitality even as Christ welcomed you into his household the church family. That you will welcome others to your table who don't look or act or think like you just like Jesus welcomes believers of all nations to his table.

That you will pursue justice like Paul did and as Jesus reigns over all things with absolute justice. I pray that God will work in your lives that God will shake your world and that the Holy Spirit will bring life into you that you might know the joy of your salvation that you may stand firm in your faith and not waver if the world goes dark around you or when it does go dark around you that you will sing praises to the Lord because you believed and you were saved and you will someday know joy in all its fullness as you worship your Lord Jesus Christ at the foot of his throne forever.

And this joy is only possible because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Let us pray. Our Lord, our Lord, you have suffered on the cross so that we might be saved and that we might know joy.

[21 : 37] and for this we thank you in the name of Jesus. Amen. Please stand as we sing together and reflect on the cross of Christ. Amen.

Amen. Amen.