

# AM Acts 16:1-40 Jesus Changes Lives

*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: 13 April 2025

Preacher: Rev Stephen Steele

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Acts chapter 16. We'll be coming a little bit later on to focus in on the second half of the chapter. But we'll read the whole chapter now.

One of the reasons this chapter is significant is because we have here the moment that the gospel comes to Europe for the first time.

As the Apostle Paul sees a vision of a man from Macedonia saying come over and help us. And they obey that call. And then we'll see today as they reach Philippi.

And we have the beginnings of a church established there in Philippi. So Acts chapter 16. And we'll read the whole of this chapter together.

Paul came also to Derby and to Lystra. A disciple was there named Timothy. The son of a Jewish woman who was a believer.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] But his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. And he took him and circumcised him. Because of the Jews who were in those places.

For they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities. They delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith. And they increased in numbers daily. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia. Having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come up to Mysia they attempted to go into Bithynia. But the spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia they went down to Troas.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia.

[ 2 : 1 1 ] Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So setting sail from Troas we made a direct voyage to Samothrace. And the following day to Neapolis.

And from there to Philippi. Which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside.

Where we supposed there was a place of prayer. And we sat down and spoke to the woman who had come together. When they heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira. A seller of purple goods who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptised and her household as well she urged us. Saying if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord come to my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us. As we were going to the place of prayer we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination.

[ 3 : 1 4 ] And brought her owners much gain by fortune telling. She followed Paul and us crying out. These men are servants of the most high God. Who proclaimed to you the way of salvation. And this she kept doing for many days.

Paul having become greatly annoyed turned and said to the spirit. I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out at that very hour. But when our owners saw that their hope of gain was gone.

They seized Paul and Sinus and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they brought them to the magistrates they said. These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept their practice.

The crowd joined in attacking them. And the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them. They threw them into prison ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order he put them into the inner prison. And fastened their feet into the stocks. About midnight Paul and Sinus were praying and singing hymns to God.

[ 4 : 24 ] And the prisoners were listening to them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake. So that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened.

And everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open. He drew his sword and was about to kill himself. Supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice. Do not harm yourself for we are all here. And the jailer called for lights. And rushed in and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Then he brought them out and said, Sirs what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. And he was baptized at once he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

[ 5 : 31 ] But when it was day the magistrates sent the police saying, Let those men go. And the jailer reported these words to Paul saying, The magistrates have sent to let you go.

Therefore come now. Come out now and go in peace. But Paul said to them, 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. The police reported these words to the magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens.

So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers they encouraged them.

And departed. Amen. Well it will be helpful if you can have Acts 16 open in front of you this morning.

[ 6 : 30 ] As we come to look at verses 16 to the end. What's the most important question that someone could ever ask?

Well it's hard to think of a more important one. Than the question we find in Acts 16 verse 30. Where a rough pagan jailer asks.

What must I do to be saved? In other words. What must I do to get right with God? Maybe that's one of the questions that has brought you here this morning.

If so you're in the right place. And we'll come to the answer of that question a little bit later on this morning. But for now just notice how personal it is.

The question isn't what's wrong with society today. Though that's a question worth asking. It's maybe a question that is bringing people to church as they ask.

[ 7 : 38 ] And can't find answers in the world. But that's not the question here. Nor is the question. Well what do other people need to do?

But what must I do? There is a focus in the book of Acts on the individual. That tells us that God cares about us as individuals.

And that we need to respond to the gospel as individuals. The book of Acts is about the gospel. The good news about Jesus going to the nations of the earth.

About it being proclaimed in Jerusalem. Where they started off. Then out into Judea. Then to Samaria. Then to the ends of the earth. So on one level it's big picture stuff.

On one level you can have a map. And you can see the gospel spreading out. The different Roman provinces. The different nations. And yet individual conversions are a key part of the story.

[ 8 : 46 ] In chapters 8 through 10. We have three chapters in a row in Acts. That describe individual conversions. There's the Ethiopian eunuch. The apostle Paul.

And the Roman centurion called Cornelius. Here in chapter 16. We have three conversions as well. Boys and girls. Did you notice as we read.

There's Lydia. She's the only one we learn her name. There's the slave girl. And there's the Philippian jailer. So yes the book of Acts deals with the big picture.

But it never forgets the importance of individual conversion. Because the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God who cares about us as individuals.

And we're going to look at the conversions of two individuals today. Firstly the slave girl in verses 16 to 24. And then the jailer in verses 25 to the end. So two main points this morning.

[ 9 : 51 ] And then a third one briefly towards the end. But firstly this morning we have delivered from demons. Delivered from demons. A couple of weeks ago someone made an unusual request in one of the local Screnar Facebook groups.

They were looking for a priest to come and bless a house. And I do have friends who are ministers who have ended up being called round the houses.

Where those living there have suspected some sort of evil presence. Even in our secular 21st century world. There remains some awareness of spiritual forces of evil.

Now you don't get the phenomenon of demon possession all over the Bible. It seems particularly to be associated with the ministry of Jesus. When the evil one rages against him and all that he has come to do.

When Christ comes into the world the forces of evil are arrayed against him. The book of Acts is in many ways Jesus continuing his ministry.

[ 11 : 07 ] Luke as he writes the book of Acts. He says at the start of it. In my former book it's the Gospel of Luke. I dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

So the book of Acts is Jesus continuing his ministry. The Acts of the risen Jesus by his spirit through the church. And so it's no surprise that we find Jesus' apostles occasionally encountering people possessed by demons.

Just as some of them did when Jesus was on earth. And here in verse 16 we have a slave girl who has a spirit of divination. And brought her owners much gain in fortune telling.

Just like today people wanted to know the future. That's why we have horoscopes and fortune cookies and so on. And here's a slave girl who seemed to them to actually be able to do it.

To predict the future. She had verse 16. A spirit of divination and an evil spirit within her. It's not that Satan knows the future.

[ 12 : 26 ] Satan is not all knowing like God is. He has the Bible's prophecies. But he's also studied human nature for thousands of years.

He has a sample size of billions. So he and his demons can make pretty good guesses about what people will do in certain circumstances. And this girl had an evil spirit within her who spoke through her.

And this is actually where we get the word ventriloquist from. For us today a ventriloquist is just someone who throws their voice. So it sounds like their puppet is talking and not them.

But the word itself was first used to describe someone who is believed to have a spirit speaking through them. And this young girl when she opened her mouth it would have been a voice that was clearly not her voice that was speaking.

And this word amazed the people. So on one level we have a girl here who is different from most people we will come into contact with today.

[ 13 : 43 ] And yet her story isn't that unfamiliar. She has owners who pimp her out. And all they care about is how much money she brings in.

She is not treated as a human being. But as a piece of property. And as Paul and his companions go to the place of prayer to meet Lydia who has just been converted.

This slave girl follows them crying out. These men are servants of the most high God. Who proclaim to you the way of salvation. Is that not true?

Well it is true. But Paul clearly didn't believe that all publicity was good publicity. Paul doesn't want people to think that he and the evil spirit are on the same team.

Spiritism, spiritualism are by definition incompatible with Christianity. And there is a warning here against any sort of involvement in spiritualism.

[ 15 : 19 ] Because it is leaving you open to these sorts of real demonic powers. And so Paul commands the evil spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

It is not that Paul is an exorcist. In and of himself he can't do anything. But the reason Jesus is at work through him.

And so in the name of Jesus he commands the spirit to come out. What happens? It comes out right then and there. And the poor girl is delivered.

As someone has put it, Paul put an end to her shouting and screaming. And broke the hold of the evil power. And restored the woman to the woman. Her self-control. Balance of mind. Freedom of spirit. And sanity. Who could but applaud the gospel and the power of the Lord Jesus. If this was its effect.

[16:25] And yet how do people react? How do her owners react? Do they applaud the gospel and the power of the Lord Jesus? Well quite the opposite. Verse 19.

As soon as the evil spirit left her. So did their hope of profit. Her return to sanity. Her return to her right mind.

Meant a loss of income for them. And that is all they care about. They have been confronted with a spiritual power. That is clearly superior to the one that had impressed the people in Philippi.

But all they can think about is the bottom line. All they can think about is how much is in this for me. And how much am I now going to lose out. Is that not scary?

That people can be so confronted with the power of God. But they reject it. Because of what they think it will cost them. Now Jesus does call us to count the cost before believing in him.

[17:38] There is a cost to following Jesus. Our lives can't stay the same. But there is also a cost to not following him. An eternal cost.

And that cost is far, far greater than anything we might miss out on here and now. But for the owners the financial hit is too much for them to bear.

They drag Paul and Silas before the rulers. Of course they don't give their real reason for doing it. They don't say, well these men are harming our profit margins.

Rather, verse 20, they appeal to anti-Jewish prejudice. These men are Jews. Then they appeal, verse 21, to Roman pride.

They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice. And the crowd join in attacking them. The magistrates get involved and have them beaten with rods and then thrown in prison.

[18:42] That's maybe the sort of thing that we can just pass over. Well, Paul's beaten and thrown in prison. And then he goes somewhere else. He's beaten and thrown in prison. But the memory of what happened to him here stayed with Paul.

He writes it in 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 2, About how he and his companions had been shamefully treated at Philippi.

He writes in 2 Corinthians 11, 25, Three times I was beaten with rods. And one of those times was here in Philippi. Paul didn't forget how he was wrongfully, shamefully treated in Philippi.

And yet that makes what happens next all the more astonishing. So firstly this morning, delivered from demons. Secondly, we see saved from suicide.

How would you react if you'd been wrongfully beaten and imprisoned? If you'd helped someone and then been attacked by a mob as a result?

[19:52] And then you'd been stripped, beaten, not only thrown in jail, but at your feet put in stalks so you couldn't even stand. Boys and girls, if you don't know what stalks are, think of a piece of wood with two holes in it.

And someone is put in jail and either their arms or their legs are put through the two holes. There's a bit of the wood that's lifted up and then it's brought down. And your arms or your legs are in it and you can't move.

And so all these men could do was lie on the cold, hard prison floor. How would you react? Some of us might have doubted whether God had really called us to take the gospel to a place like that.

Others of us might have been up in arms about our rights being violated. And Paul's rights had been violated as we find out later. Praying and singing praise to God probably wouldn't have been the first thing that most people would have thought of doing.

But by God's grace that's how Paul and Silas react. And obviously it has an impact on the other prisoners because verse 25, the other prisoners are listening to them.

[21:12] As one of the church fathers put it, it doesn't matter if your feet are in stalks, if your heart is in heaven. Paul and Silas had a joy in Jesus despite the circumstances of their lives.

And we can have that too. But then suddenly as they're praying and singing, there's a huge earthquake. The foundations of the prison are shaken. And if people are wondering whether God is at work, that assumption is surely confirmed as all the doors are opened and everyone's chains fall off.

When the jailer wakes up, he sees the prison doors open, he takes his sword and he's about to kill himself. He's about to end his own life.

The punishment for letting prisoners escape was death, perhaps with torture beforehand. We see that back in chapter 12 of Acts, chapter 12, 19.

There an angel breaks Peter out of prison and King Herod orders that the sentries guarding him are to be put to death. So this jailer thinks that he's a dead man anyway.

[ 22 : 27 ] But Paul, seeing or sensing what happens, tells him not to. He says, do not harm yourself, or literally, do not do to yourself anything bad.

Do not do this bad thing. So that is not a morally neutral act.

God's word is clear, both here and elsewhere, that it is a bad thing. Men and women are made in the image of God. And no one has the right to unlawfully take the life of someone made in God's image, whether another person's life or their own.

Now that doesn't mean that no one who takes their own life can go to heaven. But it does mean that we need to be clear about how wrong such an act is. Especially at a time when figures in the UK government are trying to amend the Suicide Act to allow what they euphemistically call assisted dying.

It is an attempt to bring in a state-sponsored suicide service. And we must oppose it in every way we can. The poll here stops the jailer taking his own life and ending up in a lost eternity by calling out in a loud voice that everyone was still there.

[ 24 : 01 ] A few weeks ago I spent a morning with a pastor from China who had similarly been saved from suicide. Being brought up in China, he'd never heard the Gospel.

He'd never read the Bible because it's banned. And he got to the point where he despaired of life itself. He climbed up on top of his block of flats and he was about to jump off.

And then he remembered the words, I am the resurrection and the life. How could he have remembered those words if he'd never had a Bible?

Well because they were quoted in one of the books that he'd read in school. A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens. The Chinese government may have banned the seal of the Bible but there, via Charles Dickens, a man who was very far from being a Christian, this distressed young man learnt that there was such a thing as resurrection.

And he thought, well if there's a resurrection then, then jumping here won't actually end it. And when he came to America, he found a church and was saved.

[ 25 : 18 ] Here too we have a jailer on the brink of ending his life. And a word from God, via God's messenger, stopped him. Paul tells them that they're all still here.

Paul and Silas hadn't taken the opportunity to escape, to save their skin. And by God's restraint, neither had anyone else. It was clear to the jailer that God was at work.

And trembling, he asked the most important question of all, what must I do to be saved? The jailer didn't know much.

But he knew he needed to be saved. Have you realised that yet this morning? Because people can sit in churches their whole lives and not realise it.

And it's not because they haven't heard the gospel preached. Well sometimes it is, sadly. But often, they've sat in church all their lives and they hear the need of salvation being preached but they think it doesn't apply to them.

[ 26 : 30 ] They think, well yeah, they're really bad people. They need to be saved. Or at least they need their lives turned around in some way. But they're good and so they're okay.

And so I want to be clear this morning. Every single one of us, if we are to get to heaven, must be saved. This jailer could tell that there was something different about Paul and Silas.

Surely he had noticed it as he put them in the stocks in the inner prison. Surely there was something different about them compared to other prisoners that he dealt with.

I met an American recently who'd been a Christian for four or five years. He was from a completely non-Christian background. But during one of the COVID lockdowns, he wasn't able to get home from college.

He ended up staying with a Christian family. And he said that they were weird but it was a good weird. In other words, there was something different about them but whatever it was, he wanted it.

[ 27 : 44 ] And then, here, verse 26, comes the earthquake. Maybe the jailer has a sense that there's something supernatural happening but he's still ready to take his own life.

But it's when Paul inside us don't take the open door of escape. It's when Paul shows compassion for the man who's locked him up, the man who's maybe been involved in beating him.

It's then that the jailer realizes that they have something that he doesn't. He realizes that if he had been to die, he wouldn't be right with God.

And he cries out, what must I do to be saved? Have you ever asked that question? Well, here's the answer. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

You and your household. What must I do to be saved? Many people expect that the answer will be a list of instructions. Start going to church, clean your life up, do these good things.

[ 28 : 52 ] But the answer isn't about doing. It's simply about believing. Why? Well, it's not because nothing needs to be done to make us right with God, but because Jesus has done it all.

He has done what we could not do. Each one of us have offended a holy God, not just by our actions, but by our words, our thoughts.

And not only have we done and said and thought what is wrong, we fail to do what is right. We fail each and every day to keep the two great commandments, to love God and love our neighbour.

What good works, what religious deeds could atone for that. But Jesus lived the perfect life that each of us fails to live and he did it on our behalf.

And he died on the cross to take the punishment for all our wrongdoing and wrong speaking and wrong thinking. In short, for all our sin and our wickedness.

[ 30 : 00 ] And so, with the authority of God this morning, I say to you, not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you might be saved, but believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Now, how much the jailer grasped at the beginning, we don't know, but they filled out the picture, verse 32, and they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

Don't worry if you feel that you don't know much compared to some of those around you. The basic message is really simple and everything else will come. If you keep coming and listening and learning and if you are saved, the most natural thing in the world will be to want your family to be saved too.

And that's the hope that's held out here in verse 31. The Bible doesn't simply talk on the individual level, it also speaks in terms of the family.

Now, none of us can save anyone else, no matter how close they are to us. But there is the expectation that what happens to one member of a household and particularly to the head of a household will impact the others.

[ 31 : 25 ] Back up with Lydia, she believes and her household is baptized. baptized. And here in verse 33, it's not just a jailer who's baptized but it's his whole family.

We're told in verse 34 that he believed not necessarily that they all believed. He rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Some of them perhaps had believed at this point as well but the emphasis is that he believes and they're baptized as a sign of God's promise to be God to us and to our children after us.

The other members of the household would still need to believe for themselves if they hadn't already. Boys and girls, you may have been baptized but you still need to believe in Jesus for yourself.

The rest of his family would need to believe for themselves but they've now been brought within the covenant. And just before we leave this point, what did this midnight or early morning hours baptism look like?

[ 32 : 39 ] Well, we're not told. Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ would say that for someone to be truly baptized they would have to be submerged underwater. Personally, I find it hard to see how that would have happened here in the dark in the middle of the night.

But whatever way it happened, don't miss the beautiful picture. The same water that is used for washing their wounds is also used to baptize the jailer.

Maybe there was a fountain in the courtyard of the prison that you could pump the handle and water would come out. Or a well that they could lower down a bucket. Or perhaps there was a bowl of water on hand already.

And with that water the jailer washes their wounds. And with that water he is baptized. baptized. He didn't care about their wounds before. He left them there in the inner prison battered and bleeding.

But he is a changed man. And so his attitude to God's people has changed. They are now his brothers in Christ. If you are changed by God your attitude to God's people will change.

[ 33 : 51 ] And as he washes their wounds and washes the blood off them and then he is baptized. It is a picture that his own sins have now been washed away by the blood of Christ.

So two salvation stories this morning. Delivered from demons, saved from suicide. But just briefly as we draw things to a close with one final point.

And that is saved to serve side by side. Saved to serve side by side. If you are new to the Bible one thing that you will notice is that in the New Testament there are letters to different churches.

The book of Acts, that is what we are looking at today, it describes how the gospel came to places like Philippi. But then boys and girls can you guess what letter was later written to the Christians who lived in Philippi?

Well there is a book in the Bible called Philippians and it was written to the Christians who lived in Philippi. So the Apostle Paul would later write these letters to the churches that had been founded.

[ 35 : 03 ] And the phrase side by side is used twice in the New Testament, both times in the letter to the Philippians. And in this chapter of Acts we are introduced to three founder members of the church in Philippi.

three people from very different backgrounds who would be called to strive and labour to use the words Paul uses, to strive and labour side by side for the gospel.

Not simply to come to church, not simply to dip in and dip out, but to strive and labour side by side. The first member of the church in Philippi, she's up in verses 14 and 15, her name is Lydia.

She seems to have been a fairly well-off businesswoman and a single parent. Then we have the slave girl, bought and sold by others like a piece of property. Our passage doesn't actually tell us in so many words that she is saved, but Jesus said that if an evil spirit is cast out of someone and the Holy Spirit doesn't enter into them, then that person is worse off than they were before.

So we can take it that she was saved. And then finally there's the jailer. Roman jailers tended to be ex-military, so a tough and a rough man.

[ 36 : 28 ] Others have been saved by this point as well. Luke mentions in verse 40 about the brothers. So there is a new and growing church in Philippi. And here are three individuals in it, from three very different backgrounds, but all saved by grace, all saved by believing in Jesus.

And they will now serve side by side in the work of the gospel. It is a beautiful picture, and one that we should see and we do see in our churches.

Churches are made up of people who humanly speaking would have no reason to be in the same room as one another. And the only reason that we are is because of the grace of God. Just before we finish this morning, I want to highlight two actions here, firstly by the jailer and then by the apostle Paul, and leave us at the cross.

Firstly, even before we look at the jailer's actions, look at his joy, verse 34, joy is such a common theme in Acts.

Conversion brings joy. Even in the midst of persecution, people are joyful. Then, verse 34, what he does next?

[ 37 : 53 ] He brought them up into his house and set food before them. It's the same with Lydia, back in verse 15. People are converted, and then as evidence of that, they show hospitality.

John Stott writes, once the heart is opened, the home is opened too. John Stott was a single man all his life. He probably wasn't putting on lavish banquets, but we can be sure that his home was open for folk to come in.

Matthew Henry asks, what have we houses and tables for? But as we have opportunity to serve God and his people through them. He's saying, what's the point of having a house unless you use it to serve God and his people?

What's the point of having a table if you're not going to invite fellow believers to come and sit around it, even for a cup of tea? And then the action of Paul that we want to touch on is this whole business of not leaving the jail quietly.

Why not just walk out and be thankful at the end? Why not just take the win Paul? Well the answer is that Paul clearly isn't just thinking about himself.

[ 39 : 12 ] If Paul had just been thinking about himself, doing what was easy for him, he would have claimed his citizenship earlier, asserted his rights. And so surely he's now asserting his rights for the sake of the gospel.

perhaps for the sake of these Christians that he's going to leave behind in Philippi so that the magistrates will think twice about hassling Christians again.

They've had to come and apologise publicly in daylight. They'll not be so quick to harass Christians in future. Paul doesn't claim his rights simply in order to avoid suffering but he does claim his rights when it will help with the spread of the gospel.

In fact what would have happened if Paul and Silas had claimed their rights earlier? If they hadn't gone to prison? Well the Philippian jailer wouldn't have been saved. His salvation could only come about through suffering.

Do you see where we're going with this? Because ultimately that brings us to and leaves us at the cross. Ultimately the only way the Philippian jailer or any of us could be saved was through suffering.

[ 40 : 29 ] Was because Jesus resisted the temptation to avoid suffering and he went to the cross and the very wounds that he suffered brought us life because it's by his wounds that we are healed.

Amen. ■