

Paul in Philippi

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of May 1999. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled Paul in Philippi and is from Acts chapter 16 verses 16 to 40. God we pray that you would open our hearts help us to understand your word may it make sense to us and may we live it out in our lives for your glory's sake.

Amen. You may like to open your Bibles at Acts chapter 16 on page 900 as we look at verses 16 through to 40.

And for those who may be visiting us and for the first time today over the past few weeks we've been looking at Acts chapter 15 and 16.

And in those chapters we have seen how the gospel of Jesus Christ breaks down social and cultural barriers between people. And we've seen how it impacts other cultures and is transferable as well into other cultures.

[1 : 1 6] And last week as we looked at the beginning of chapter 16 we looked at the gospel coming to European soil for the first time in the Roman colony of Philippi.

The gospel had left Asia and been taken over to European soil in Macedonia. And in it we saw how Paul, the apostle Paul looked for entry points to share in the gospel.

And we saw the beginning of the Christian church in the city, it was a major city at that time, of Philippi. The conversion of Lydia and her household in the first few verses of Acts chapter 16 becomes a place where the Christians in Philippi will meet on at least two occasions that we read about but it is highly likely that Christians met there on numerous occasions for meetings and so on to build one another up in the faith and worship of God.

We're following the conversion of this lady called Lydia and seeing how the Lord opened her eyes to the gospel of salvation. Luke now goes on to communicate two further incidents where people in Philippi are healed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first is seen in verses 16 through to 24. And in these verses Luke introduces, the writer of the book of Acts, introduces us to a slave girl they met as they were on their way to the place of prayer which was outside the city gate in Philippi.

[2 : 5 2] Now this girl, she was a girl. She was a slave. And we see that her owners exploited her because she was a fortune teller.

They used her to... They used her and the owners made a great deal of money out of her as verse 16 tells us. There was no doubt that she was good at her job because in verse 17 she accurately describes who Paul and Silas are, who these two foreigners in the city of Philippi are.

And she says, These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you a way of salvation. Now in the world's eyes, she's worth a fortune.

She's able to predict... She's able to tell things that are going on. And sadly we see how her owners capitalize on this girl's abilities. Now she follows Paul and Silas around the city for many days repeating these same words.

These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. The statement she makes is true, isn't it? And we could even think that it is a good thing that she is promoting around the town.

[4 : 13] But we see in verse 18 that this is a very annoying thing for Paul. It's irritating. And it's a bit like having a kid follow you around the shopping centre saying, Dad, or Mum, or Grandpa, or Grandma, Dad, I want this.

Dad, I need a drink. Or the one that we all hate. Dad, I want to go to the toilet. You're going to find a loo for them. It's annoying.

And it's annoying for Paul in one sense. This lady repeating all these sorts of things. And we're told it's annoying. But it's also deeply distressing for Paul.

It's deeply distressing because he sees the way in which this girl is being exploited. And Paul is provoked to take action as a result. And in his distress, Paul turns around and he says to the spirit, I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

Which it did. That very hour, as verse 18 tells us. Now, although we aren't told, I suspect this woman was relieved of her troubles.

[5 : 30] Well, she was. But she was also to become another member of this Philippian church, this new church which had started in Philippi. Well, that's good for her, isn't it?

I mean, it's great that she's been healed of this illness and she's received Christ and she's now welcomed into the church. It's good for her.

But Paul's troubles, the Apostle Paul's troubles, are just about to begin again for him as he comes into Philippi. What he's done for this woman here, for this slave girl, has eternal value for her.

But it's caused her owners, who use her as her means of employment, it's caused her owners to become unemployed. They're going to have to go to the PES, the Philippi Employment Services, to look for work.

Their livelihood is done away with now that this girl is made normal. And in verses 19 to 24, we see the trouble that Paul and Silas get into.

[6 : 38] If they weren't known in the city by the slave girl's words before she was released from a spiritual bondage, they were now. Her owners, the slave girl's owners, realise in their predicament, what do they do?

They seize Paul and Silas, drag them into the marketplace, the very centre of the city's public life, and place them before the authorities and so on.

They are known by this time. And the charge, their charge is serious. Verse 21, they say, these men, referring to Paul and Silas, are disturbing our city.

They are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe. Now, the Roman citizen wasn't allowed to practise any foreign religion which had not received approval of the state.

It was, however, the custom to allow it so long as the practice didn't offend against the laws and usages of Roman life. It seems here that these slave owners were very clever in their presentation, in the way they used their words.

[7 : 53] They not only concealed the real reason for the anger, and that is, it's an economic reason. I mean, they had lost any hope of any income for them for the future because this girl had been released from her bondage.

They concealed that. But they also presented their legal charges against Paul and Silas in terms that appealed to the anti-Semitism of the people in Philippi.

They said to the people of Philippi, in effect, Paul and Silas are Jews. I mean, that's not a total truth in itself in verse 20. And they incite the people.

They say, Paul and Silas are Jews and we, we are Romans. And in doing so, they ignited the flames of this racial bigotry and so on that's going on.

And so what they do is they whip the crowd up into a frenzy who then join in the attack of Paul and Silas. And we see and we read that the magistrates order their severe beating and jailing, ordering them to be kept under close guard and that they're put into the inner cell of the jail.

[9 : 05] Now you'd think that Paul was wondering if God had truly guided them over to Macedonia as we talked about last week. You'd really wonder whether God had guided them over to Macedonia with the sort of treatment that they are receiving.

They have been stripped and publicly beaten in the town square of Philippi and that would have been humiliating, humiliating for anyone.

Now I was once arrested, might shock you, but I was once arrested in Iran in 1996, not 1966. And it was humiliating, very humiliating.

I was travelling from London to Kathmandu with a group of people and we got into Iran, it was the middle of summer and it was very hot and we were on this truck and the truck needed a wash.

So we'd put our bathers on thinking that was the right thing to do and we'd wash the truck. Within five or ten minutes we were surrounded by people from the Iranian army, I guess, and we had machine guns pointing at us and all sorts of things.

[10 : 16] And I was terrified. I was... I didn't know what was going to happen. We were scared we were going to lose our passports. We only had a seven-day visa to get through the place and we didn't realise we'd done anything wrong.

But culturally, we had done the worst thing. We were in our bathers and travelling through those countries you're really meant to be covered from neck to knee.

I was scared. I was humiliated. We were eventually let go. But it was a most terrifying time. And after that experience of having been arrested, I just wanted to go home.

But I still had four months of travelling to do. Well, my experience was nothing like Paul's and Silas's. Yet we see in verse 25 how they respond to the situation that they are placed in.

We see here, we read, in the inner cell of the jail with their feet in stocks, no doubt in considerable pain after their severe beat and they wouldn't have been able to move much in these stocks.

[11 : 23] We read that at about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. And you know what? The other people that were with them, the prisoners, they were there and listening to them.

It would have been a great occasion. They weren't complaining. They weren't humiliated. They were singing hymns of praise to God. There were no groans of pain but the songs were coming from their mouths.

And instead of cursing men, they blessed God. It's no wonder that these prisoners listened to them. They must have thought they were a bit strange but they listened to them, what was going on.

And these are words that we need to hear as well. Do we have a sense of the majesty and awe of God despite our afflictions?

Or do we seek to complain against people who have wronged and humiliated us? Do we seek to bless God and honour God in all situations that we are placed in?

[12 : 27] Well the next few verses, 25 and 26 at least, display a whole host of improbabilities for the reader.

In it, in these verses, we see the second incident of how God works in the life of the Roman jailer and radically changes his life. The things that happen, these whole series of events that happen are bizarre.

There's a violent earthquake. There is the opening of jail doors. They just don't open. These doors open. The prisoners' chains are unfastened.

But no prisoners try to escape. One person told me the other day of these verses that this is the Christian concert that brought the house down.

It's just a huge event. Well it's a bizarre incident. And to the sceptic, these words would be all too unbelievable.

[13 : 31] But to the person who is searching for faith, there can be no mistake that the sovereign hand of God is upon this entire situation. Paul and Silas have been placed in this jail, in this inner cell, by sinful human beings.

And God's sovereign action brings about their release, as well as faith in God for the Roman jailer. God has turned what looked like a seemingly hopeless position for Paul and Silas into a situation of good.

And God also turned a situation of despair for this Roman jailer into a situation of hope, as well. You see, this Roman jailer in the circumstances that were placed before him was about to commit suicide in this prison cell because he would have been the one who was held responsible for the escape of the prisoners.

But Paul shouts out to him not to harm himself because all the prisoners were inside. They're still there. Now if you were a prisoner and a situation like this arose, I imagine you would perhaps try to escape.

Harrison Ford does that in the movie The Fugitive, doesn't he? He's tried unjustly and the train crashes and his chains fell off, I guess, and he escapes.

[14 : 57] He's chased. You'd escape too, I think, if you were placed in that situation. But not here, though. The prisoners, all of the prisoners, and Paul and Silas, are still there in the jail cell.

Jail doors open, chains fallen off, they're all still there. And here, in an amazing turn of events, the jailer rushed towards Paul and Silas.

He fell down before them, trembling, and he says in verse 30, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Perhaps he had heard the slave girl in the city saying that these two knew the way of salvation.

or it was just the sheer magnitude of the situation that was before him. Whatever it is, he asks them, what must I do to be saved?

Why? Because they know what he must do to be saved. And their answer is seen and it's made and it's put straight to the point in verse 31. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

[16 : 05] You and your household. And then the word of the Lord is spoken to them. Now when Paul extends the offer of salvation, the offer of eternal life to the jailer's household, is he saying that his faith, the jailer's faith, will convert this entire household?

Not at all. I don't think it is saying that at all. Paul is offering salvation to everyone in his household on the same terms as he is to the jailer.

That is, by belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, they too will have salvation. And we shouldn't read this as saying that his faith, the jailer's faith alone, will save his whole family.

But as he and the family listen to the word of God, this verse shows us as one person writes, that the New Testament takes the unity of the family seriously.

And when salvation is offered to the head of the household, it is a matter of course made available to the rest of the family. Now that sort of situation where households are brought into the kingdom of God is seen on several occasions throughout Acts.

[17 : 22] the story of Cornelius, when Cornelius understands what salvation, he and his household, could be his family and the servants and other people that are in the house, also hear the gospel message and they come into the kingdom of God.

The story with Lydia, just at the beginning of chapter 16, the Lord opened her eyes and she and her household are baptized because the word of the Lord has been heard by the family.

And here too, the Roman jailer he hears the word of the Lord and his family hears the word of the Lord and they too are converted and they are baptized.

Well, and grateful thanks for showing them the way to salvation. The jailer then, in verse 33, washes Paul and Silas, washes Paul and Silas, cleaning their wounds and he and his household, as I said just a moment ago, are baptized.

And we see, again, yet another instance in the book of Acts of hospitality, in verse 34. And this time, hospitality occurs at midnight when the FA Cup is on.

[18 : 35] And this hospitality is held in the jailer's own home. Food is brought to them and there is much joy for everyone because salvation has come into this household.

Now, hospitality is such an important aspect of the early church. I think it aided the mission of the early church. It helped it. Now, today, however, with people getting busier and guarding their private lives more, much of what used to be done in homes is being done in restaurants and hotels.

Now, that's not necessarily a bad thing. It's a good thing. But the question I want to ask is, are our homes as significant for mission today as they were in the first century?

Do we open up our homes? I think that in the parish, as we've opened up our homes to parishioners through hospitality Sunday and through coffee and dessert nights, many are realising the benefits of just opening up our homes, not just for ourselves, but for the benefit of others as well.

And I would want to encourage each one of us to continue doing this and also encourage us to be opening up our homes for mission through hospitality as well.

[19 : 58] And by that, I mean perhaps holding an evangelistic event in your home, a Bible study, an evangelistic Bible study where you bring your unconverted friends along or a craft night with a Christian message involved in it and so on.

Plenty of people enjoy doing craft things. I have a friend who used to have, he still may, have port and cigar nights for his non-Christian friends.

And that was an entry point for him to share in the gospel because he had friends who were interested either smoking their real cigar or fake ones, it doesn't matter. But that was an occasion to bring them together and they would have dialogue meetings and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

It was an entry point for the gospel. Well I'm sure you can think of other creative ways and I've talked about other ways over the past week in which we can share the gospel but this is looking about, looking at ways of sharing the gospel through hospitality in our own homes.

Well despite the pain and turmoil that Paul and Silas have been through, there is joy in their hearts knowing that God has used them to bring this jailer and this household to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 21] Now in verses 35 to 40 we read what happens the next day. The magistrates must have felt that the punishment given out to Paul and Silas was sufficient. So they send word to the jailer to have them released and to tell them that they could go in peace.

But Paul isn't going to leave without justice being done. You see, he and Silas had been condemned unfairly. They had been beaten and thrown into prison and there is no way that Paul is going to let this go without justice prevailing.

Well what's this injustice then? It's the very fact that a Roman citizen has been beaten, bound, tried and condemned. It was against Roman law you see for a Roman citizen to be beaten or bound by a magistrate or by any other person in any circumstances.

And Paul and Silas as we are told in verse 37 are Roman citizens. their citizenship privileges have been severely violated.

Harsh penalties would have been prescribed to anyone who violated those laws. So Paul is not going to leave without a public apology. And I don't think it's due to the anger that he, anger within himself that he insists on this.

[22 : 43] Rather, it is for the well-being of the church. You see, if they had left Philippi after their release, after this initial release, without creating a fuss, it could have set a dangerous precedent for the future treatment of any missionaries that may have been working around that area.

And it could also have left the small group of Christians that were in Philippi exposed to arbitrary treatment from the magistrates. Therefore, they insist on a public apology which would also ultimately influence the public standing of the mission and the church within Philippi.

So they insist on it and we see that they get it in verse 39. The magistrates discover that they are Roman citizens and they are afraid of the consequences. And they get their public apology.

Then Paul and Silas leave the city in peace following this incident after having returned, as we read in verse 40, to Lydia's house in order to meet the brothers and the sisters, perhaps the Roman jailer, perhaps this slave girl, and encourage them in their faith as well as to say goodbye.

Well, in chapter 16, all of 16, Luke has recorded three stories of lives being changed by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 10] First, as I've started off with the story of Lydia, which we saw last week. And then we've seen today the story of this poor exploited slave girl.

And thirdly, the story of the Roman jailer. Three lives which were from three very different racial and social backgrounds. Each of them had different personal needs as well.

Let me read to you what one person has written. Lydia could said to, Lydia in the first verses of chapter 16, Lydia could be said to have had an intellectual need.

At least the point makes about her is that as she kept listening, as verse 14 tells us, the Lord opened her heart, meaning really her mind, to attend to what Paul was saying.

The slave girl had a psychological need. True, she had an evil spirit which needed to be exercised, but being possessed, then as now, can have terrible psychological consequences.

[25 : 17] She had lost her identity, her individuality as a human being. If socially she belonged as a slave to her masters, psychologically she belonged to the spirit which controlled her.

She was in double bondage, but in finding Christ, she found herself. she became an integrated person again.

As for the jailer, we could say that his need was moral. At least we know that his conscience had been to some degree aroused since he cried out to know how to be saved.

three different peoples from three different backgrounds, three different needs.

And that the needs of human beings, it seems, do not change with the changing of years. We all have needs. We all have needs. And Jesus Christ can meet our needs and he can fulfill our aspirations, no matter what our background may be.

[26 : 30] We're going to sing in just a moment this great Charles Wesley hymn, And Can It Be? And the great words to remind us of what we have become, I guess, in Christ.

And it starts off, well, I'm going to read you two verses, verse 3 and verse 5. He left his father's throne above, so free, so infinite his grace, emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.

Tis mercy all, immense and free, for oh my God, it found out me. And then for the Christian, these words of the last verses, so free.

No condemnation now I dread. Jesus and all in him is mine. Alive in him, my living head, and clothed in righteousness divine.

Bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown through Christ my own. Let's stand as we sing this fantastic hymn. éch over to God.

[27 : 58] That's good.