

The Conversion of a Slave Girl

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn once again to Acts chapter 16, verses 16 to 24, where we're looking today at the way in which Paul, through the power of God, cast out a demon out of this young slave girl.

As we were going to the place of prayer, that's the place mentioned in the previous passage that refers to Lydia, which we saw last time. As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune telling.

Now, it's interesting that Luke, in writing the book of Acts, has inserted this incident between these two incidents of Lydia's conversion and the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

We're not told specifically that this young slave girl was saved, that she came to know the Lord for herself. But it's strongly suggested by the way that the passage itself is fitted into the context, because it's obviously dealing with the Lord's establishing of a church in Philippi.

And these are the foundational members of the church in Philippi. This woman, Lydia, this businesswoman who was attending to the word of God and whose heart the Lord opened.

[1 : 25] We saw that last time. And she gave a place to Paul and to Silas and to those who were with him in her house. In other words, it was such an important event for the church and for the establishing of the church in Philippi, because there was the Lord providing a place for them in which to meet in this convert's home, in Lydia's home.

That's where they came to meet, obviously, from that first passage. And then you find the Philippian jailer converted. The way in which that came about, God willing, we'll see next time, as another member is added to the church in Philippi.

Very, very different kind of person to Lydia. And so too was the slave girl, very different to both of these, to Lydia and to the Philippian jailer.

Here is, nevertheless, the way the Lord works. He doesn't found a church by finding people who are exactly the same or similar. He founds churches by taking people of very different backgrounds and very different social situations, very different personalities, very different in years of experience, very different in their ways of life.

And yet that's what he uses. And as he changes these people, they all come to be the same spiritually in Christ Jesus, the same relationship with God through Christ, the same interests in terms of the gospel and of serving God.

[3 : 03] They're brought together by the work of God, by God's grace, so that, just like ourselves, we've come from all of different circumstances and backgrounds and experiences and ages.

And God has brought us together into one congregation. That's what he's doing, what he was doing at Philippi. It's all to do with God's plan in planting a church in Philippi.

And let's remember, when we think of church planting, it's not people who plant churches. It's not churches who plant churches. Yes, we speak about church planting. And it's important to speak about church planting.

And the way that God sends people to different areas to establish congregations. And preaching the gospel or witnessing to Christ, people come to believe.

And a church is planted. But it is God who plants the church ultimately. It's God who changed these people. It's the power of Christ that actually took these people and made them foundational to a church, to a congregation.

[4 : 08] We have to remember that as we come to look at this as well. So here, first of all, is an imprisoned girl set free. She's imprisoned because she's not just a slave girl who's owned and used and abused by what's called here her masters, her owners.

She's also enslaved to sin, to an evil spirit. She's enslaved spiritually. She's involved in things which are dark.

Things which belong to the world of darkness, of sin, of, as we'll see, of divination, of spirits that are themselves evil influences in her life.

So she's an imprisoned young girl. She's enslaved to sin, to evil, to her owners. And Jesus sets her free.

And as a result of that, you have God's free servants who come to be imprisoned. Paul and Silas, they're free. And as we'll see, they're actually Roman citizens. So they're free in a legal sense as well.

[5 : 20] But because of what happened and of the violent reaction of those who owned the slave girl, they come to be thrown into prison. And not just into prison, but into maximum security, into the inner prison, where the most dangerous prisoners were usually locked up.

These are the two things, two contrasting things that you find in the passage. Let's look at this girl first of all. This slave girl who met us who had a spirit of divination.

She was actually very different, of course, to Lydia. And she was tied to these owners. She was used in order to bring them monetary gain.

She was used to make them lots of money. She's not even named. We don't know her name. Lydia's named specifically.

We're told her name. Her individual personality indeed is brought out in that. And she's identified by her name. This young girl doesn't. She, we're not told her name because in a sense you could say that she'd lost her identity.

[6 : 31] She's so enslaved and so held by the powers that own her humanly and of the spirit world that she's really not herself. She doesn't have an identity other than this.

She's not a person in the sense in which Lydia is a person free from that sort of influence in her life. This young girl doesn't really have a name as far as we're concerned.

She's just possessed. She's lost. She's lost her identity. She's embroiled in this evil, in this sinful world that she's caught up in.

And she's used for fortune telling. Now that she was, she had an evil spirit within her. And in a Greek text, it's interesting how it's put.

She had a spirit of divination. It's translated there, a spirit of divination. But actually it really says, let's see, she had a spirit of python. Python, you know, is a snake.

[7 : 31] And in those days, the idol Apollos, who was a god so-called of the Greeks, had a temple associated with him.

And there was also a place called the Delphi Oracle, which people frequented in order to actually have pronouncements made by people there specially chosen to make oracular or speeches that would tell you something about yourself or your future.

Well, this young girl was possessed by that spirit. The spirit of python, supposedly the guardian of the temple of Apollos. And that's what her life was about.

And she obviously had the ability or some kind of ability to tell people their fortunes or supposedly at least to tell them their future and to predict things in the future.

And that's what she was used for. She brought her owners much gain by this fortune telling. She was tied up with this evil world, but she was used to make money for those who own.

[8 : 47] Those who possessed her. She was exploited. She was vulnerable. She was tied up with this cursed spirit within her, with this demon that inhabited her.

And that gave those who owned her the advantage. Because of the evil gift that she had, it was exploited by those who owned her for their own advantage.

To make lots of money for themselves. There are many in our world today, as we meet here today, in our freedom, in our relative prosperity, there are many people in the world today who are exploited because they're so vulnerable, because they've been left in desperate situations, because they have no one else to look to but people who will exploit them, because they see no way out of their situation, except by paying money to people who supposedly will look after them and actually turn out to abuse them.

War. War. War. Poverty on a huge scale. What do these things cause? They cause people to be left so vulnerable, so desperate, that they'll sell their children as sex slaves into prostitution.

And people will then use them to make lots of money for themselves. Why is there such a trade in human beings?

[10 : 29] Why do you find people cramming into boats trying to get from parts of Africa and other places across to Europe?

Because they're desperate. And because they're desperate, people exploit them. How do they come to actually make the arrangements to travel?

Because people have charged them lots of money for it. And there's nothing at the end of it but more misery. Let's remember that this is the world we actually live in today.

People make lots of money out of other people's miseries. That's what sin does. That's what evil spinners do. That's what the world of darkness is about. It's about exploiting people.

It's about taking people's lives and abusing them. It's about making monetary gain out of people's desperate plights. We have to pray for these people.

[11 : 31] That they be set free. That Christ comes into their lives. Some of them may be Christians in fact. There are many Christians in the world who today don't have the privileges that we have to meet in a church in a cozy hall.

who don't have the freedom to do this free from fear of persecution or even annihilation. There are many Christians today who have to, like many other people, just because of their poverty and their plight and their desperation, sell themselves to people who will own them and then abuse them and make lots of money out of them.

That's the world that we live in. This is not an isolated incident in the days of the apostles. This is not something that is just fragmentary. It's not something that you see here and there as a little pocket in the world.

It's endemic in human life. It's part of what human beings are like naturally. That when the opportunity comes to make lots of money out of other people's misery, many thousands of people will be ready to do it and are doing it.

Here was this young girl. She was caught up in this situation. She's in a desperate situation. She's imprisoned by these powers and by these people who own her. She's exploited. She's being used and she's being abused.

[12 : 56] And so she starts crying out after the apostles. She's not crying out for help. All she's crying out is because the evil spirit recognizes who these people are, what they're doing.

As we see in the ministry of Jesus, evil spirits recognize Jesus. They know Jesus. They know when Jesus lives in people like Paul and Silas. This young girl, the spirit that was in her recognized this.

These men, she said, as she followed him about day after day, they are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. Now she was telling the truth. She was talking truth.

She was speaking truth. She was saying things which were true about these people. She was actually mentioning salvation that these people, Paul and Silas, were making known and proclaiming the way of salvation.

But why didn't Paul take advantage of that? Why didn't he take this young girl and say, listen to what she's saying. She's telling you the truth about us. Well, because although she was speaking things which were true, they were coming from an evil source.

[14 : 03] And they were not with right motives. Paul didn't use evil spirits. Paul didn't use means where such powers were at work.

He didn't use that to promote the gospel, to further the gospel. He avoided that. He shunned that. And for some time, this went on until eventually, Paul, having become greatly annoyed, Now that's not really the best translation, because what it really means is Paul having become deeply agitated.

He was disturbed about this. He was grieved, is the way it is in the AV. I think it's, he was grieved, being greatly grieved at this. Why was he grieved? Why was he more?

It's not just annoyed about this. Like, this translation gives you the impression that he was just all of a sudden annoyed, or after a process that he'd come to the point where he just couldn't put up with it anymore.

That's not what it is. He was deeply moved. He was deeply agitated. His soul was stirred. He was grieved in his heart. Why was he grieved? He was grieved over what he was seeing, this young life like.

[15 : 11] He was grieved seeing this young girl enslaved to this darkness. He was grieved too because it was potentially damaging to the gospel, to the message that he'd come to proclaim, to the name of Jesus, to the purity of Jesus.

He didn't want Jesus actually at all associated with evil spirits, with the kind of spirit that inhabited this girl. He was grieved. Well, it's difficult not to be moved and agitated over such a sight as that.

Isn't it? But the owners didn't care. Other people didn't bother with it. Paul was grieved. That's the difference a Christian heart makes.

And you and I today, as you look at people's plight, how do you come to be grieved over them? You see them from the perspective in which God views them.

You look at them from the point of view of God having created them and this is what they've come to. That's what Jesus showed when he came to the grave of Lazarus.

[16 : 20] Lazarus and the sepulcher. He was greatly disturbed within himself. He was agitated in his soul. Why? He was agitated because he saw in front of him what sin had done to human beings.

He was Lazarus. He wasn't just, Jesus wasn't just grieved over the loss of a friend. He was deeply touched by death, by the death of his friend.

But more than that and above that, he was deeply agitated in his soul because this is what sin had done to human beings. This is what it had left, the legacy of enslavement, the legacy of death and the grip of death.

Now here's this young girl and this is what Paul is grieved about. He sees a young life. He sees someone that you might say has potential. She doesn't lack abilities.

But they're all directed to the service of this evil spirit and of these ruthless owners. Paul is grieved about that. And if you and I are going to be any use for the Lord and any use in the service of the Lord, well we're going to have our hearts grieving over situations that only God can change.

[17 : 38] When did we last grieve over such situations? When did we last weep when we saw such things happening in our world? When we think or even read about things that happen where people are so badly exploited, where young lives are blighted, where people are sold out of desperation?

Do we weep about that? Do we see things from the perspective that God sees? Do we see them in the way Paul saw this young girl? Or are we just getting so used to life as it is that our souls are becoming somewhat numbed?

Let's hope that that never happens. Let's hope that you and I never come to the point where people in their desperate plight don't move us to tears. He was deeply grieved.

And he said in the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her. Now Paul is specifically mentioning the name of Jesus Christ.

This young girl was going around saying these men are sermons of the Most High God. And Paul very deliberately associates that Most High God now with the name of Jesus Christ.

[18 : 53] So that people will understand from what they're seeing and hearing that this Jesus Christ that Paul is preaching about and proclaiming and is a servant of is none other than the Most High God.

What he's going to do what he's commanding now in the name of Christ he is actually calling upon the power of the Most High God. And isn't it important too that Paul actually went to the root of her problem.

She was a slave girl. Paul wasn't indifferent to slavery. He didn't praise slavery.

But it wasn't her social condition that he focused on. It wasn't anything outward that he focused on. He went to the root of her problem which was the evil spirit that lived in her soul.

he went to her inner being. He focused on that. That had to be dealt with first and foremost.

[20 : 05] Otherwise things were not going to be changed outwardly. That's what you and I must focus on as well. Are we today you and I are we getting to the root problem of life?

Of your life? Of my life? Are we skirting around the root problem of sin? Of the need of forgiveness?

Of washing? Of our inner being? Are we just focusing mostly on the outside? Are we really determined to get to this root of sin?

That Christ will deal with it for us? That our heart will indeed be changed? So that then our whole life will be changed? That's what it's saying to us.

Paul actually became greatly agitated. He turned and said to the spirit he focused directly on what was inside this girl. And he said I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of it and it came out that very hour.

[21 : 15] This is Paul demonstrating the power of Christ. And this is not like so many people that claim nowadays to have this apostolic power.

Nothing is impossible with God we know that. But don't be taken in by the charlatans you see on TV screens that pretend that they are actually acting in the name of Jesus.

Here is an apostle of God specially endowed by God to work this kind of miraculous work. And the result is instantaneous.

She's set free. The spirit comes out of her that very hour. It's gone. She's been emancipated. She's a changed person.

The root of the problem is dealt with. The Lord has come and taken the very thing that dominated her life and cast it out. And now there's something else has come to dominate her life.

[22 : 23] This Jesus whose name was mentioned it's in his name that the spirit came out of her. And surely we take from that that that same Jesus came to live in her instead of the evil spirit that he cast out.

That's the root of the problem dealt with. That's what happens when sin is dealt with. When God comes in power to change our hearts inwardly the results are then shown in our life outwardly.

But then there's a result of that. There's a response to that. When her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers and so on.

You can read through it as we've read through it. And they ended up of course being thrown into prison. Well you can see why they're actually so annoyed. It's quite blatant.

Luke is actually saying to us this is precisely how it is when the owners saw that their hope of gain was gone. That's how it is today with thousands in the world who use and abuse people to make money for themselves.

[23 : 33] When the hope of their gains is gone of course they're annoyed. People who are involved in drug running and sex and gambling and human traffic and are in it to make lots of money of course they're going to be annoyed when the source of their gain is gone.

That's all they're in it for. They don't care about the people they're exploiting. It's not because they find people in poverty and really care for their plight and want to really pluck them out of that and give them a decent life.

No they're out to make gain for themselves. They're out to make money for themselves. Remember friends that all of these things in our world today whether it's drug trafficking or human trafficking or sex and pornography it's all big business.

It's out to make lots of money. People are out to use and abuse people to make much for themselves. They prey on the weak and the poor and the desperate there's lots of power involved, lots of influence.

That's what it was like for these owners. But now you see Christ has brought something about that they're annoyed with. The source of their money, the source of their income is gone.

[24 : 49] This girl has lost her ability to predict the future. her. So they are now without her. What are they going to do? Well, what they do is they cause the magistrates to cast these people into prison.

Notice the clever strategy that they used. They brought them to the magistrates and they used two arguments. Firstly, a racial argument. These people are Jews. These men are Jews.

They advocate customs not lawful for us as Romans. You see, they're saying we are Romans and these people are Jews. How dare these Jews come into our locality and bring such a message in order to cause such problems to us.

Look, we've lost our employment. We've lost our employee. They've taken this girl away from us. Our source of income is gone. And they also use the legal argument.

Of course, it's not lawful for them to bring this practice, this teaching into our midst. That's how they stood up the opposition. The real reason is that they've lost their source of income.

[26 : 02] They don't mention that, of course. They just cover that up with the racial and the legal arguments. And isn't that exactly how it is now?

Isn't that why you read and listen and see so often in your news bulletins, although not as often as you would like, but certainly in bulletins that come from Christian concern, from the Christian Institute, from others that bring us things that are happening in our nation, that are happening in terms of how policies are put in place and what laws are coming to be put in place.

Paul and Silas had the law on their side. They were Roman citizens. The law should have protected them from this mob, but it didn't. And isn't it so in our nation as well?

What kind of arguments are used against freedom of speech when it's Christian freedom and Christian speech? Well, people will say, but that's being racist.

if you're going to convert people from secularist ideas, from being Jews or Buddhists or whatever, then you're acting racially or you're acting in a way that's discriminatory.

[27 : 27] There's a phobia about it. You're being homophobic. You're always a phobic somewhere added just because it's a Christian voice. And just as it was with Paul and Silas, so it is with us as well.

The law doesn't protect you anymore if you're a Christian and you want to actually speak as a Christian. I'm not saying it should be just Christians that should have the freedom to speak and to present their point of view tactfully and properly.

Everybody has the right to actually speak in terms of what they believe, even if it's different to what other people believe, but that's not how things are moving because today laws are used against what is specifically Christian.

Look at the bakery in Northern Ireland. They refuse to bake a cake for a same sex couple with a homosexual message on the cake.

These people are Christians. They have a Christian business. They refuse to put that on it. So what do they do? What's the response? They're discriminated against.

[28 : 38] They're abused. They're persecuted. They're taken to court. The same with Durham Free School, a Christian school.

Ofsted inspectors went into the school. They claimed that the children weren't being taught in accordance with the needs of equality.

and all of these sorts of things. How did they come to that conclusion? Because they said that children under 12 years of age were not being taught things which you and I think really only belong to adult thinking.

that's what Ofsted inspector said. You should be teaching these children about these adult things. And because you're not we're going to put that in our report and there's a danger to be closed down.

And what happens? The education secretary, a member of the government, says, yes they're right. I can't agree to continue funding to that school so it has to close.

[29 : 50] That's what happens. That school's got to close. Why? Because the government won't fund it. Why? Because it's Christian. Purely and simply. Yes that's not what's said. There are all these sort of ethereal reasons given.

The fact of the matter is Christianity Christianity the things of Christ will always be opposed and sometimes even opposed in law and sometimes even opposed by people in government and that's what Paul and Cyrus found out here in Philippi.

The laws that should have protected them, they were ignored. They were now cast into prison and the jailer was given strict instructions to keep them safely.

Now insisting that's we could say a lot more about those sort of things but that's what's happening in our society today. That's why I have to pray, pray earnestly and stand up, really stand up consistently against the tendency to discriminate against the Christian voice because that's really what's happening and with a general election coming up you and I have the responsibility to make sure that we're as far as we can, that we are supporting and voting for people with specifically Christian values and outlook and confessions because that's what you want to see.

You see the laws didn't protect these people and the laws couldn't change this young girl. Only the power of Christ can do that and it's the power of Christ that you want to see in people's lives and in parliaments and in members of parliament and they actually beat them first of all as you can see here.

[31 : 48] They inflicted many blows upon them. Now these would have been from what were called the lictors and these were people who were appointed to carry, well they were really like canes, a number of canes tied together and an axe at the other end.

Think of an axe with a long handle, and onto the handle were tied these long canes. And it was a symbol, symbol of punishment, a symbol of the magistrate's power to inflict either pain or even death because that's what an axe does, takes your head off.

And that's what these Christians, these men, this apostle and his companions, that's what they experienced. they were thoroughly thrashed.

The lictors laid into them with these canes. Their backs would be cut deeply, lacerated, bleeding.

Then they were chucked into prison, into the inner prison, against the cruel, the cold, hard rocks, with their bleeding backs.

[33 : 09] All because they had preached Christ. All because they were his servants. And we don't hear anything else about the girl.

but God is not finished in Philippi. Paul and Silas, whatever their thoughts were, God was going to come to use this girl, or had come to use this girl in a remarkable way.

It was through her conversion, through her change, that this reaction took place. It was through this reaction that Paul and Silas were placed in prison. And it was through that that the Philippi jailer came to be converted.

However hard evil tries, there's only one winner, with a capital W, and that is you, Lord, Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you again for instructing us through the things that happened so long ago in Philippi, and yet bring to light things which are so relevant and so current in our own situation.

[34 : 24] Help us, we pray, to be true to you, such as these men were, and as they, in their confinement, in their pain, could find it in their hearts to sing praises to God, even so that the rest of the prison there could hear their singing of praise.

Lord, enable us, we pray also, to go on praising you visibly, whatever adversities come our way. Hear us now, we pray for Jesus' sake.

Amen.