

Acts 16:11-40 (PM)

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[0 : 00] Let me ask you a question. How much are you worth? How much are you worth? We live in an age where people are often spoken of with regards to their net worth.

Have you heard about that? Their net worth? It's kind of how much money you kind of have, take away all that you owe and you end up with a figure. What would that be? If that was your worth, what would you be worth? I was at a school in England and as I went around, I was taking assembly and then I wandered around, there were posters at various points and each of the posters was an amazing story. The poster was, the first one I came across was of Albert Einstein and it basically announced that Albert Einstein had, well, educational needs. He suffered from dyslexia and he hadn't done very well at school. It then told you that in spite of that, he earns more dead to this day than a lot of other people. He is wealthy today even though in his day he didn't earn lots. But actually he's worth lots as all the things that he has inspired and even, I think it's called Baby Einstein, continues to be sold on the shelves. His name carries on. Another poster that I came across, there was a guy called Richard Branson. Have you heard of him? He is behind Virgin, Virgin Plains, Virgin Radio Station, anything kind of Virgin, that's him and it told me that he was 3.6 billion. That is what he is worth to this day. The poster also told me that he struggled with dyslexia and educational and yet has achieved this amazing amount. Well, as I wandered around the school, there are other people. Tom Cruise, did you know he had dyslexia? Do you know that Kieran Knightley as well?

There are many famous people who, in spite of educational struggles and barriers, they have achieved great amounts and as a result, they are worth a lot. I confess as I walked around, I was saddened slightly by the posters. I don't know whether you would have. I know what they were trying to do. They were trying to encourage all the children there to think big even though educationally they might not, at school, succeed in the way that people might want them to.

[2 : 45] But my heart sank because I'm there going, well, what would it look like if there was my face? Mark Ashworth, father of three, worth probably a couple of bucks. Do you know what I mean?

But underneath, written in bold, worth. Worth. Well, what would I be worth? To God, worth everything.

Worth his son dying on the cross. That's what I wanted to see on some of those posters. I wanted to see a reminder that our worth is not our net worth. It's not how much money we earn.

Our worth is not in the job that we have. Our worth is not in our name, being a legacy that lasts for years and years and years. Our worth is so much more than that. And what you're going to see here in the Bible passage today blows away what was the ancient Near East's understanding of worth. Come on with me back to the passage that we looked at. If you've got a Bible, turn to Acts chapter 16 and let's have a look at some of the characters that engaged with Paul and Silas as they went on their missionary journey.

But of course, in those days, your worth wasn't necessarily, well, it wasn't the same as how many TikTok viewers you've got and other bits and bobs that we see today. But in those days, your worth was to do with whether you were a Roman or a Jew or a Gentile. Your worth was to do with whether you were born male or female. Your worth was to do with whether you were free or a slave. And if you think of yourselves, I don't know where you stand on the kind of male, Roman, educated and free would have been up there. If you were female, you would be down here. If you weren't a Roman, you would be down here.

[4 : 56] And if you were a slave, you'd be even lower. And so as we read our Bible passage today, I want you to gasp. I want you to be shocked. I want you to go, oh my goodness, that's shocking.

But the problem is today, 2,000 years later, we don't, do we? We read these and we go through them and they're often quite familiar stories. So let me try and help you understand what this would have meant many, many years ago. God invites a woman. That's a gasp. That was an opportunity for you to respond. God invites a slave girl. And God invites a brutal Philippian jailer into his kingdom.

It might be a bit of fun, but that would have been the response. That kind of response would have been there. And Philippi, where was this Philippi? Do you know what? Philippi was a bit like the Vancouver of its day. It wasn't the capital, but as we read in verse 11, look with me in the Bible, you'll see verse 11, it says, it was a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. It was multicultural. It was bustling trade center and wealth and power ruled the day. Business boomed. But there was also corruption.

In Acts, we see the spirit, the spirit of Jesus breaking through in this materialistic, imperialistic world. But it didn't break through without a fight. And again, we'll see that as the spirit takes this people on its journey. In Acts, we see the spirit of Jesus. And it starts with a woman called Lydia. We know that she's a wealthy woman. Have a look with me. How do we know that she's a wealthy woman? Well, we're told that she was a dealer in purple cloth. Purple was a dye, was actually quite a rare dye. Tyria was kind of, Thyatira was the area that she came from. And that's where the actual dye is likely to have originated. And as a result, she was quite a wealthy businesswoman. We never get told whether she was a divorced or whatever circumstance she's in. But we do know that she is also a Jew. Spot with me. Verse 13. On the Sabbath day, Paul and Silas went outside the gate to the riverside. Why would you go outside the gate? Every other city that they've gone in, they've gone to the synagogue. They'll go to the synagogue. And when they've gone to the synagogue, they'll then preach. Well, if a city does not have 10 Jewish men, it doesn't have a congregation. [7 : 57] If it doesn't have a congregation, then you can't have a synagogue. So where do you meet? You meet by the riverside. So that's what Paul and Silas knew. This wasn't a city that was friendly to Jews. This was not a city that was friendly to Christians. There were only 10 Jewish women meeting to pray outside the city. And that's the beginning of our story. This was a hard place for the gospel to break through. But one who heard, verse 14, was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods who was a worshipper of God. She was a businesswoman.

And as I said, would have been probably quite a wealthy businesswoman because we hear of her household later on. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptised, her household as well. She urged them to stay. If you've judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us. What a shocker. Three things. Three things. Number one, Paul was teaching women. Oh, come on. But you get the point. Women in those days were not supposed to be in educational establishments. This is really shocking. But actually, Paul was countercultural. Paul and Silas went out and they taught these women. As a result, they responded. Secondly, she was actually there listening. We know that she was a Jew. But she was a businesswoman in a busy city, in a bustling city. And probably this was a day where she could have done some trade. Especially because everyone else was Roman. They didn't care about a Sabbath.

What happened? She listened. This woman who might have had financially all that she needed was in need of something more. Rich people need Jesus. Did you know that? Richard Branson needs Jesus.

Albert Einstein needed Jesus. We all need Jesus. Thirdly, another radical response. What does a woman who has great wealth? Do once her heart has been transformed by Jesus? Well, we find this. She opens her house and her home. And she desires to serve. Look at verse 15. She longs to serve and show hospitality.

[10 : 40] Meeting with Paul and Silas. Hearing as the Spirit works in her heart, she is transformed. She doesn't order the servants to sort them out. I'm a bit too busy. I'm down the road at my shop. But look after these people. No, no, no. Her heart was transformed. Everything stopped. She showed hospitality and her house was their house. I wonder whether that's what happens to you and me when we hear the good news of Jesus. Do our hearts want to well up in hospitality? Do we love people so much that we'll drop what we were doing? Going, do you know what? It's much more important than I listen and I spend time with you enjoying fellowship. We're going to see it happens again. This is not just once. This is one of several times where the Spirit comes in and radically transforms people. In Vancouver, I see flashy cars.

I can't help but seeing that. Well-dressed people. I see lots of evidence of people with great worth financially. But the question is this. Do they still need Jesus? I have no doubt they do. Our story continues. Part two. It looks like it all goes wrong. But actually, sometimes what looks like it all goes wrong isn't truly it all going wrong. Verse 16. Look with me. Paul and Silas were going to the place of prayer. They were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune telling. It was another booming business. They had this young girl. She could fortune tell and they were raking the money in. Brilliant. Or at least that's what they thought.

But not what God thought. God wants to invite everyone into his radical Christian community. And it means that this slave girl needs to be free to hear the gospel. So what happens? Well, Paul, I don't know why he didn't instantly cast the Spirit out. Maybe it was because the Spirit actually declared truth. Did you see what happened? These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. At first, I'm sure Paul and Silas were there kind of going, thanks for the attention. She's right. She's right, you know. She's right, you know. I've got news of great salvation. She's right. Three days later, as she kept shouting that thing, we're told Paul gets a bit annoyed. It suddenly becomes not a great advertisement when the local crazy starts declaring this truth.

[13:32] And we don't know why, but Paul basically says he was irritated. So he called for the Spirit to come out of the girl. As a result, in the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her, Paul cried. And it came out that very hour. What a joy. Free, freedom. The girl is released. But that's not what everybody thought.

The business people of the city were shocked. They no longer had their performing pony. They no longer had their steady income stream. This fortune-telling girl could no longer tell fortunes. And so, as we talked about, on the scale of how much was she worth, suddenly she was worth less in the eyes of those. If you can't do this, if you can't do that, if you can't earn us money, you're as good as not anything. And yet God has a bigger plan. His bigger plan is not what we obviously see, first of all.

We see him inviting others to join the story, even through persecution. Did you spot that? Her exploitation then led to Paul and Silas' persecution, public humiliation, physical abuse, and it's all masked behind an air of Roman rebellion. Oh, they're rebellious. They're anti-Roman, which they weren't, of course. But it got them in jail, and it got them punished, beaten up.

Could it have gone any worse? Paul and Silas were supposed to be encouraging the churches. This is no encouragement. Just imagine, I'm hoping next year to take a team of youth to either Nepal or India. Just imagine I go over there. The church is praying. The news comes back. Oh, Mark and all the youth are just in prison. How would you respond? Would you say, oh, God is at work? I'll bet you wouldn't. But that's what we see in this passage, don't we? We see God is at work. Through this persecution, through this awful situation where he's put in jail, we're going to get to see the next amazing miracle. This Philippian jailer transformed by God. He has a bigger plan. And so, as they are in jail, what happens? They are singing and praying, praising God, and suddenly an earthquake comes.

When the earthquake comes, Paul and Silas gets up, and they run free. They've escaped. Or at least that's what I would have done. Wouldn't you? Did you notice in the stories that's not what they did?

[16:24] We're not told why they didn't escape. But God has a bigger plan, a bigger purpose. Instead of them legging it and running away, God has a plan to transform the life of this Philippian jailer.

And this Philippian jailer is never going to be the same. For whatever reason, they don't run away. And the Philippian jailer just about to kill himself. Stop! We're here! We're all here!

The Philippian jailer having decided he was going to kill himself. Because to be honest with you, if your one job is to keep people in jail behind bars and you fail to do that, what are the Romans going to think you're going to be good for? Not a lot. They probably would have killed you if you hadn't killed yourself first. But God has a much greater plan. What happens? As a result, when the jailer woke and saw the prison doors were opened, he was going to kill himself.

But instead, Paul cried out, do not harm yourself, for all are here. And the jailer called for lights and rushed in with trembling and fear. He fell down before Paul and Silas. And what did he say?

What must I do to be saved? Isn't that ironic? Did you see the irony there? This is a Philippian jailer talking to people in jail, okay, who possibly might have been praying, please save me.

[17 : 51] And what's the Philippian jailer saying? Please save me. And the likelihood is he's probably the one who's beaten them and locked them in there in the first place. God's view of things of the earth is so radically different that sometimes when you think, oh no, I'm in jail, God thinks, great.

He's where I want him to be, speaking to the people that I want him to speak to, because salvation is going to come to this place. That's what we see here. And so they respond, believe in the Lord Jesus 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 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. Do you see the pattern? The radical transformation?

This man who probably would have beaten them, had locked them away, suddenly was saying to them, how do I get saved? But not just me, it's my whole household. We all need to be saved. And then what's the response? Service, hospitality. Did you see that there? They rejoiced that they had believed. The Lord had opened their hearts. All the way through these stories, Philippian jailer, Lydia, the slave girl. God's word is doing its work. Had you spotted that three times? Verse 32. Verse 14. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said. Verse 17. These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. The word is doing its work. And by God's spirit is transforming people from being slave owners, being persecutors, to being servant-hearted.

[20 : 04] Did you spot that? Lydia, the Philippian jailer? The impact goes way beyond not just the individual, but their household. And this is the first story of faith in Europe. Some of us come from Europe.

And so we are. Well, this is the first step of the gospel coming to Europe and impacting Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. We see this last little section.

What's happening here? Why is Paul and Silas making a bit of a song and a dance about this? Oh, we're Roman citizens. Come on and look up with me. Verse 30. The police reported these words to the magistrates. They basically refused to go. They said to them, Paul and Silas, go, go, just sneak out, get out of our city, you're too much trouble, go. Paul and Silas said, no, we're not going. Are we told why? No, we're not told why. But the likelihood is this. Paul and Silas were encouraging the church. What kind of an encouragement would it have been if they had left at that point? Not much. What would you have learnt? The church gets persecuted, you get put in jail, and if you're lucky, you might escape. Otherwise, you're stuck. No, no, no. Paul and Silas wanted the Romans to know that this Christianity, following Jesus Christ, is not anti-Roman.

[21 : 40] Following Jesus Christ, is not anti-male. It's not anti-anybody. It is for everybody.

And so they made a point of saying, we're not going to go. So eventually they had to come and apologise to them. Look, verse 38. The police reported these words to the magistrates because they had declared that they were Roman citizens. They were afraid when they heard this. Corrupt magistrates were in trouble. Romans are not supposed to beat Romans. That wasn't allowed. They're allowed to beat women. They're allowed to beat Gentiles. They're allowed to beat others, but not Romans. Paul and Silas, rather than leaving defeated, received an apology. And this baby church in Philippi, we're going to hear about Philippi, the letter to the Philippians later on, if you read it.

This is the church as it goes from strength to strength. So I want to finish with three things. What a shocker this story has been. But we're not surprised today. Why? Turn with me in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 3, verse 28. I'll finish here. Galatians 3, 28. And you'll understand a bit more how this was such a shock, but you'll understand the context in which this passage was read or written. Galatians 3, 28. We're told, There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male or female. For all are one in Christ Jesus. Let me say that again. Have you spotted the pattern? There is no Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female. All are one in Jesus Christ. And this passage, as Luke has written it down in Acts, just proves it. This gospel is for all. God is counter-cultural. He is showing that this is great news.

[23 : 49] God is worth worth, irrespective of God, and this is great news. We have this lingering idea of, well, they're worth more than me or they're worth less than me.

All tied up in our job and our status and maybe our skin color or maybe where we come from or what we can achieve. God says, God says you are worth it. I love you so much I'm going to die. Send my son to die on the cross for you. So as the world that we live in says, oh, you might not be worthless, but in reality, you are worth less. God says you are worth everything. And he shouts from the pages of the Bible, you are valued and you are loved. Come to me and find your proper place. Come as a child of the King of Kings with true freedom and everlasting riches, where the materially wealthy rub shoulders with the poor, where the youth rub shoulders with the elderly, where refugees and regent professors are all in the same congregation. This is the church that we are a part of. This is the legacy that was left in Acts. Will we live lives as they did? Servant-hearted, sacrificial, even suffering at times, so that the gospel may go from this place to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Young and old, we can all be part of this great God story we see in the Bible. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you for the transformation we see in the pages of the Bible, but we also thank you, more importantly, in the transformation that is in our hearts. Continue to work in us. And maybe there are those in this congregation now who do not know of the transforming work of the Spirit in their lives. We ask that you would touch them, challenge them. Maybe they're slaves to their worth. Maybe they think that they are worth less. Draw alongside them and speak into their hearts that they are worth dying for. They are worth everything. That they may have their value in a relationship with the King of Kings. So send us out from here with such great news. For your namesake and for your glory. Amen.

[26 : 38] Amen.