

A Slave Girl Released & God's Servants Imprisoned

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[0 : 00] on the Lord to Acts chapter 16, and we're looking tonight at verses 16 to 24. Acts 16, verses 16 to 24. This is the account we have of the way that Paul dealt with this slave girl, as she's called, and the result of that for himself and Silas, as they were thrown with their companions into prison, and then that, of course, led to something else. Now, last time we looked at the conversion of Lydia, and that was really the beginning of a short series of studies on conversions that you find described in the Bible, conversions that tell us not just much about what conversion is, but some of the other issues as well relating to conversion. It's important that we understand, obviously, what it is. It's even more important that we are converted ourselves, but also understand that there are consequences, which the Bible also spells out clearly, even if they're not always, of course, the same kind of consequences as you find happened here for Paul and his companions. Now, it's interesting that this incident is sandwiched between the account we have of the conversion of Lydia and then the conversion of the Philippian jailer, and all we can say about that is that it's suggestive. There's nothing categorically to say that this slave girl was actually converted, but it is suggestive the fact that it's placed here between the other two, and especially given that this is really the founding of the church in Philippi under the ministry of the apostle. It's certainly instructive, and it's very suggestive that this slave girl also was converted, that she had come not only to be delivered of this demon that occupied her life, but that she was also someone who had come to know the Lord savingly, and therefore became part of, indeed a foundational part of, this church in Philippi. And of course, as we'll see too, that led to consequences for Paul and his companion, especially Paul and Silas, where they were actually thrown into prison as a result of what happened here. So, the two things we're going to look at that come directly from the passage very simply. First of all, we'll look at Satan's slave set free, and then secondly, God's servants imprisoned. Satan's slave freed, and God's servants imprisoned.

Now, we're told about this slave girl that she met them as they were going to the place of prayer, presumably the one that's described in the previous passage relating to the conversion of Lydia. In any case, as they were going to this place of prayer, they were met by this slave girl who had a spirit of divination, as it's called there, and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She was, in other words, enslaved, and she was enslaved not just in human terms, and being used and exploited by those human owners that were using her for their own advantage, for their own monetary gain. She was also, as is seen by the devil that was the demon, the demon that was cast out of her, she was also enslaved to evil and to the devil himself, using this demon that occupied her life. And it's interesting she wasn't even named.

Now, sometimes the Bible doesn't actually name people quite deliberately. Sometimes they're actually believers, so that we can see that it's not the people who are most prominent in the church that are exclusively important in the furthering of God's kingdom. We're told about two people here in this passage that came to be foundational to the church in Philippi, and we don't even know their names. The slave girl and the Philippian jailer, they're not named. Lydia is. This girl was so different to Lydia. Lydia, as we saw, was a businesswoman, somebody who had done well in business, somebody who had an upright life outwardly, somebody who had that kind of lifestyle. But here is somebody, a very different type of person, this unnamed girl, who had that kind of thing. And she is in the grip of evil. She is in the grip of evil. She is in the grip of people who are exploiting her and using her for her own ends.

It may well be that we're also to conclude from the way that the Bible misses out her name, that really because of what she was involved with and all that she was held by, she had lost her true

identity. And indeed, that is what sin actually does to us anyway, isn't it?

We lose that particular identity that God created us with, as made for himself, as in communion with himself, as having himself as our Father in heaven, until that is restored to us in Christ.

[5 : 40] And the more we are embroiled in sin, even if there's nothing like demon possession or anything to that extent, the more nevertheless it clouds that reality that we are made in God's image, that God indeed did make us in the image and likeness of himself. And that is what sin, our sin and your sin, the sin that occupies our heart, the sin that we commit daily, that sin in itself is such a distorting thing, such a damaging thing, such a spoiling thing, that here is somebody whose identity, whose true identity, even whose personhood is lost amongst this mass of corruption that she's involved with. Now it's said that she had a spirit of divination, and we can see from the way Paul spoke to this demon that occupied her, he turned and said to the spirit to leave, to come out of her. We know that from that, that this was actually a case of demon possession. And she had in that demon possession an ability to actually predict the future, or something like that is translated here, fortune-telling.

And because she had that ability, and it is a very solemn thing that evil gives people certain abilities by which sin itself is served, but by which other people can exploit that and use it to their own ends. And here is a girl who's caught up in this dreadful situation. She has a demon possessing her. She has the ability of bringing, of fortune-telling, and is so used, therefore, by these people who own her. It's a terrible thing anyway, isn't it, to be actually owned by other human beings.

And let's not be forgetful of the fact that throughout the world tonight, there are many people who are owned by others, who are virtually slaves and slave labor. We value our freedom. We have to maintain that freedom. We have to stand for that freedom. It's absolutely precious. And there are many people throughout the world that you hear about who are owned by others, who are involved in human trafficking, who bring a lot of monetary gain to those that own them.

And they live a dreadful life, whether it's in prostitution or other similar types of activities, but that's the reality for them. They are used and abused, and they're caught up in that web of sin and sinful practices. And sometimes they have no way out of it. And they end up so caught up in that, that that's the whole of their life.

But here is a specific case of demonic possession. Now, we have to be very careful about this because we mustn't conclude, as some people do conclude, that many instances even today of certain deranged types of behavior are actually due to demon possession. We mustn't actually come to such conclusions. There were specific instances of demon possession in the days of the apostle and in the days of the Lord Jesus Christ himself in his own personal ministry. And that's one instance of it here. And they were also made known to the apostles. The Lord made it known to them infallibly so that Paul here was able to speak directly to this demon in order to actually, in the name of Christ, drive this demon out. And in fact, you find that that is essentially what Christ came into the world to do to overcome the power of Satan. And we don't want to give too much publicity to the devil, to the devil's work, not even when it arises from Scripture, because although it's a reality and it's still a reality, we have to be careful not to give him that oxygen of publicity, because that's something that he can thrive on.

[10 : 08] Now, you remember Jesus himself casting out demons from people during his ministry. And in relation to that, he said that this, as he drew a picture of that and what it was about and why it was happening, it was really to demonstrate who he was and what he was in the world to do. It wasn't all about casting out demons, but the casting out of demons was something that was symbolic or representative of how he had come to crush the head of Satan and the power and the hold that Satan had over people's lives, especially out in the Gentile world, in the pagan world, to which the gospel was going to reach in the days of the apostles. And the picture Jesus made was a strong man living securely in his house.

And then a stronger than he comes upon him. And the first thing he does in order to spoil that person's house, in order to ransack the house, is bind up the strong man himself. And then he ransacks the house. Now, that's a picture of Jesus coming in his power to deal with the power of Satan.

There is Satan, the strong man, in his own house. And having bound up many people and holding them prisoner, Christ came into the world as the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that by death, he might destroy him that had the power of death. That is the devil.

And the casting out of demons is part of the program that Jesus was involved with in coming to destroy the works of darkness, to overcome the works of darkness, and to actually give the death blow to Satan's reign in people's lives.

And so we come to her being set free. She kept doing this 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 that very hour. It's interesting, isn't it, what she said and kept crying out, was, these men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.

[12:41] Now, it's difficult, really, logically, to see how somebody possessed of such a demon, before that demon was cast out by Paul in the power of Christ, could actually come and cry out these very words repeatedly, these men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation. But, you know, sometimes, as Jesus himself in his ministry demonstrated, devils just can't help themselves when they're confronted with Jesus and the power of Jesus. Their identity is actually made known in their vehement and violent opposition to him. And even here, although the girl was speaking out words that were true, it's really the fact that this demon was confronted with Christ that made her cry out this way about these men and what they were doing, forced into an acknowledgement of the supremacy of Christ. And again, if you compare that with the

Gospels, you'll find that that's something that's frequently mentioned in the Gospel in regard to, or a number of times in the Gospel, regard to demons inhabiting people, such as Legion, for example, in Luke chapter 8 and other passages in the Gospels. What do you find happening when Jesus comes to confront that person that's named Legion because of all the devils, that demons that occupy that person's life? What have we to do with you, said the demon? Jesus, Most High, have you come to torment us?

What is that telling you? It tells you that demons know who Jesus is. And one of Luke's concerns in his Gospel, as we've seen already a number of times, is that he poses this question strategically throughout the Gospel. Who is this Jesus? What's his identity? And what's his business in the world?

What's his ministry about? Well, here are demons who know very well who he is, what his ministry is about. They're confronting him as one they know is supreme, one who is above themselves, one who has a mastery over them, one who knows that he is going to subject them at the end of all things to torment, to the pains of hell.

And you remember James in his epistle, as he's dealing with this issue of faith, that faith does not exist on its own without works that are related to it.

[15:17] One of the things he says in passing, but it's a very important aside, is that the devils, where he says, well, you believe, yes, you're doing well if you believe.

If you believe that God exists, if you believe that God is. But the devils do that, he's saying, and tremble. They know the reality of God. They believe in God. There are no atheists. There are no atheists among the devils.

They believe in God. They believe in who he is. They know who he is. They believe in who he is. They know who he is. They know who he is.

He is. They know who he is. He know who he is. They know who he is. They know who he is. They know who he is. They know who he is. They know who he is. They know who he is. Thomas Watson, it was, who said, as we often did, statements that are so easy to memorize and take with you.

He said, there are two things that are really, really difficult in the preaching of the gospel for the preacher of the gospel. One is to make Christians happy. The other is to make sinners sad.

[16:46] one is to make Christians happy because they have salvation they have Christ they have everything they need in Christ therefore they should have the happiness of the saved and to make sinners sad as well by which he meant to convince sinners of their need of Christ of their lostness of the seriousness of sin of the reality of sin well here is a demon who knows who Jesus is even though it's in the preaching of the apostle that he's hearing about it and so she cried out after them and Paul having become greatly annoyed turned and said I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her and it came out that very hour that means at that very moment of course it's not Paul himself who's doing this not Paul's own power that's doing this that's why he's saying in the name of Christ and really that fits in with what this girl said these men are servants of the most high God and Paul didn't say I command you in the name of the most high God he could have said

but he said in the name of Jesus Christ in other words he's equating the the term the most high God with this Jesus Christ and he's commanding this demon in the name of Christ and that's what happens instantly the demon is expelled and the girl is no longer under that tyranny that mastery of that devil now please don't confuse that with please don't correspond that with what you find often happening on your TV screens on God channels and in other similar types of publications where you find high-powered ministries advocating casting out demons and purporting to do that and when you dig down although it's possible of course that you still find people demon-possessed and it's still possible that Christ will expel demons from people's lives but he doesn't do it in order to actually have people gain private jets and expensive mansions from it is that what the gospel is about is that why Jesus said amongst the beatrix blessed are the poor there are so many people sadly taken in friends in this world but what purports to be and is passed off as the gospel and it's not the gospel and it's a dangerous message a message that leaves people in their sins because all they actually do is see that the gospel has to do with this kind of dramatic this kind of dramatic event but this is a specific case of demon possession revealed to the apostle and the other thing about it is that you'll find in the New Testament we're not going to get drawn into this subject

I want to come back to this girl but what you'll find in the New Testament is that for each specific case of healing or demon expulsion God gave faith to these apostles at that specific moment that that's what was going to happen wasn't advertised weeks or months in advance for a great showy performance to be carried out that's not how it operated in the days of the apostles and in fact it's confined in the Bible to the apostles as well as Jesus and one or two of the immediate companions of the apostle to which God gave that ability that's in the days of the apostles that's in the days of the founding of the New Testament church and once the New Testament church was founded and once the Bible was complete and scripture was complete these gifts these abilities disappeared with that generation and please don't think

I'm limiting God as if this doesn't happen at all or shouldn't happen or cannot happen God still has the ability to do all the things that we read of in the Bible that he in fact did in the past but let's be careful always to follow the Bible's own arguments and teachings and follow them carefully so that we're not drawn into a false gospel and a false sense of expectation because these are unique times in the days of the apostles well here she is and in the name of Jesus he commands this evil spirit to come out of her and it came out that very hour but I really want to focus on before we move on to the second point is this you notice how Paul went to the very root of the problem this girl had many social problems this girl had many problems in her life to do with the fact that she was held under the ownership of these people and under the slavery of this demon but Paul didn't actually go to these he went to the root problem he went to what was really at the root of her of her lifestyle and commanded this demon to come out of her and there's a principle in that there's a principle in that that tells you and tells me that our lives are not made lives that know the Lord and come to be saved and come to holiness of life by dealing with the peripherals by dealing with the things that are just ancillary if you like to the main problem you have to go to the root problem of your life and that is your sin and it's not just your sin in terms of the acts that you do in your mind or with your words or by your actions in the world that's not the root the root is in your soul the root is in your sinful disposition the root is in the fact of original sin the root is as David described in Psalm 51

I was conceived in iniquity he's not blaming his mother for anything that was true of his life for the sin that he had committed for the way in which he was and knew himself to be a sinner for the confession that he was making when he said I was conceived in iniquity and in sin what he was saying is this is part of my being when I was conceived when I was developing in the womb and when I was born I was born a sinner I was born a sinner with propensity and bias to sin and that's where our sins actually come from and in order to deal with your life and my life and set it right with God we need to be thinking not just about our sins important though that is because in a sense that's really like somebody going to the doctor and the doctor just looking at the symptoms and telling him these are the symptoms

I'm going to give you something for that and your life will be straightened out doctor's got to go to the root of the problem he's got to go to or she's got to go to what are the symptoms that are associated with what is really the illness or the disease or whatever that's affecting that person's life and the devil would have you believe that you can just tidy up your life that by your own efforts you can deal with the sins and that you can cut some of these out and just deal with the excesses and try and live the best you can as a Christian life and that'll work out all right for you well it won't

because David says in that same Psalm Psalm 51 not only was he conceived in iniquity and in sin he then pleads with God Lord create in me a clean heart you desire truth in the inward parts so create in me a clean heart

[25 : 55] David acknowledges my need is so great that only God can deal with it but God being God as the creator is fully able to deal with it and that's your great comfort and my great encouragement tonight but whatever problems you have in life and even the root problem of life itself as sin you come to the Lord and say Lord you create in me the opposite to this create in me a clean heart you deal with the root problem and then everything else begins to follow from that but if you leave the root problem the sin this inward bias of sin in our hearts if you leave that and deal with the rest you're still not saved that's why the Bible tells us in that famous passage in John chapter 3 there's Nicodemus he's living a life of a teacher in Israel he's a member of the ruling

Sanhedrin in Israel in Christ's day and he sees something different about Jesus and he comes to Jesus by night and he says Lord no man can do these things that you are doing except God be with him and you expect Jesus then to give him a discourse exactly in relation to the question that he has in mind and Nicodemus is serious enough about the question he wants to find out more about this and Jesus turns to him and says to him truly truly I say to you except a man be born again you cannot see the kingdom of God Nicodemus has never heard the like he's fine outwardly he's a religious man he's a member of the ruling class but he's never been born again his heart is still the way it's always been and you see there is something that you and I must remember tonight we're not dealing with demon possession in my case and in your case whatever problems we have in life we're not in the grip of such a demon or such a power or such an influence as this girl was and we may be very different to many people in the world tonight who are caught up with addictions that have become very public and our heart goes out to them we pray for every ministry that's used to try and help them but you see it wasn't just the prodigal son that was out of sync with God the elder brother was too maybe even more so than the younger one in his self-righteous arrogance he was just as far from God as the young brother who had left and wasted all that he had been given and taken in the riotous life that he lived tonight there are so many millions of very decent people outwardly people who have a good lifestyle people who have a civil way of life and haven't really done any positive harm or committed any great public crime or notoriety they're still sinners they still need Christ they're still lost they still need to be born again and so you and I are included in that great statement you must be born again well God's servant imprisoned secondly just briefly because this was the result of it there was this very angry response when our owners saw that their hope of gain was gone they seized

Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers and when they had brought them to the magistrate 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 or practice you see how skillfully they set about accusing Paul and Silas they didn't actually come to the real point of their dispute with them at all which was the fact that their own hope of gain or further monetary gain was now gone the source of their income had been wiped out you know that's just always a test for us isn't it when the gospel and the blessing of the gospel touches upon your life and touches upon your life materially what is our response to that because that itself will go some way to telling us whether or not we're honest and serious about this Christianity business about this born again business is about this following of

Christ business because some people are put off by the fact that it's going to affect them financially it's going to affect them in terms of what people think of them as it was for these people as well so they rebel against it and they were brought and these accusations were made against them you see it wasn't the real source of their frustration or their opposition but rather they used the racial card first of all these men are Jews and we are Romans surely you're not going to allow these Jews to advocate customs that are unlawful for us as Romans to accept so they used the law or they wanted to emphasize the law and its practice which in Roman times allowed for different religions throughout the Roman Empire but you need a special permission to convert or to go from one to the other that's what they're trying to use against these men these men were actually using their religion to change people from what they wear into something else and that reminds you of something doesn't it tonight it reminds you sadly of our own circumstances in our own nation in our own kingdom that there is a very obvious and increasing hostility to Christians actually practicing their Christianity so that they will actually call for people to be converted don't be surprised if things

go as they are go on as they are if in 20 years time or whatever it will be far more difficult for me or for whoever is in this pulpit to actually preach a message that called upon people to change their lifestyle to come to

Christ to repent and in that way to follow what God himself is setting out in his word for us because that's the hostility of the evil one let's remember friends that whatever generation we belong to as you actually look beyond the things that are on the surface just as here in this incident itself as you dig down below the surface and below the political arguments and below the social arguments for this that or the other to be said against the church and against Christians what's really happening in the ultimate sense because that's what it's all about and will be to the end of time it's Satan versus Christ isn't it and when you read the book of the Revelation at the end of the Bible you'll find that that is the conflict throughout history and will be the conflict through to the end of history it's the lamb and his followers against the beast and the dragon and their accomplices and that's the warfare warfare that lies behind sometimes unnoticed that Christians should be perceptive enough to it and realize that's the warfare that's behind every event where gospel principles and God's truth are being assaulted or denied or overturned and it's no surprise whatever that for a nation that increasingly is setting the Bible aside we are seeing a call for new laws new laws to protect people supposedly protect what protect ungodliness protect people from being preached to and as we are aware of that our prayer is that God will intervene because frankly only the Holy

[34 : 45] Spirit can change people's perspectives and give them insight into what it is exactly they are doing when they are taking on God and here are these two servants of God and they were beaten with rods they were thoroughly thrashed is what it means and then thrown into prison and the jailer was given the order to keep them securely or safely in other words it's maximum security for these two people they can't have any freedom at all they are too dangerous you can't let them free otherwise they will keep preaching this message that changes people's lives and sadly that's the case for many thousands of people today too who are thrown into prison because they believe in Jesus and they want to see the kingdom of Christ advanced and human kingdoms brought subject to Christ but what's happened to the young girl she's gone off the scene hasn't she because God is bringing us along this wonderful journey following these conversions and looking at them and looking at the result of them and looking at what happened afterwards she's gone from the picture she doesn't appear anymore we assume she was converted there's nothing there to suggest she wasn't converted and we like to think as we said at the beginning that she became part of this church in Philippi having found release from her sinful lifestyle from the way that she was enslaved to this demon but God is not finished with her life completely because the result of what happened to her as it involved Paul and Silas brought them into contact with this

Philippian jailer as a beautiful and wonderful flow of one event into another because God is now bringing us to see as we'll see God willing next time the change in this slave girl that he brought about that Jesus brought about as it resulted in these prisoners these two servants of Jesus being thrown into jail so that actually leads directly to the conversion of the jailer himself it's amazing isn't it here they are they gave orders to this jailer to keep these two men safely and what happens through them he comes to know Christ for himself isn't God amazing isn't this Jesus wonderful isn't this really one of the things that makes it so worthwhile to follow him to give your life to him to be ruled by him to turn away from your sin and have your life organized and ruled by this Jesus because he's the one who's in charge of all that's happening in these chapters and all that's happening even in the world today and all that will happen in your life and mine as well the situation that happened that ensued from the conversion of this slave girl that itself was God creating a situation for the next conversion you know it's an exciting thing to be a servant of Christ not just a minister but all servants of Christ you never know who the next convert is going to be who would have expected as I said last time that the founding of a church in Philippi would involve these three very very different people Lydia and the slave girl and this Philippian jailer and may well it may well be that the next prominent

Christian and most effective Christian for God in this town is tonight somewhere lying in the gutter or caught up in some worldly lifestyle somebody that you and I might just readily dismiss as you would have this slave girl and I would have and this Philippian jailer don't ever think that way this is a wonderful God a God who surprises us and a God we hope will surprise us many times in the days to come whatever the opposition is against God there's only ever one winner and that's this Jesus let's pray almighty God we thank you for the power that creates new hearts and for the power

that changes lives from what they were in their native state to what they are by your grace we thank you tonight for the many people that you have changed throughout the world and in this town and in this congregation we thank you for the privilege of serving you as a consequence of coming to know that benefit of being born again we pray

Lord for each of us here that our great concern this evening itself might be to live lives that are converted to you and by you to live lives that will serve you faithfully to live lives that will be beneficial to other people and will bring them to see the beauty and the power and the sufficiency of our Lord himself hear us now we pray for Jesus sake amen we'll conclude our service this evening singing in psalm 56 psalm 56 from the sing psalms on page 73 and our verses are verses 1 to 4 these three stanzas in conclusion oh my god show mercy to me men would take my life away hostile forces press upon me they pursue me all the day slanderers are close behind me they pursue me all day long in their arrogance they hound me they are numerous and strong when i am afraid i'll trust you i will praise your faithful word i will trust and not be fearful what can man do to me lord these three verses to god's praise oh my god show mercy to me men would take my life away hostile forces press upon me they pursue me all the day slanderers are close behind me they pursue me all day long in their arrogance they hound me they are numerous and strong when i am afraid i'll trust you i will praise your faithful word i will trust and not be fearful what can man do to me lord if you allow me to get to the main entrance please after the benediction now may the grace of the lord jesus christ the love of god and the communion of the holy spirit be with you now and always amen to the would

[43 : 12] Jim and that we should try to ask to explore things about the