The first church in Europe

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Preacher: Robert Murdock

[0:00] Well, it's to have been with you today and again tonight and the work in here in Westerhills and John Lowry and I go back a long way.

So I was in Ballymena for two years and John had come to another Baptist church. And so we kind of got to know each other at that point and we've kind of kept in touch.
And at different points we've kind of bumped into each other. So nice to be here and as I say to see the work that you're involved in here at Westerhills.
So if you have a Acts chapter 16, Acts 16 and we'll read from verse 6. And this is really Paul's second missionary in Acts 16.
And he's already traveled around the churches that he and Barnabas in southern Galatia. And he and Barnabas had a bit of a tiff and he left with another chap called Silas.
[1:14] That's Paul. And Barnabas took John Mark and went back to Cyprus and called Silas. And here we are joining them in their missionary endeavors.

Paul told throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been kept by the Holy Spirit of Asia.
And when they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter but they did not allow them to.
So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia standing begging him. Come over to Macedonia and help.
In the vision we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia. Concluding that God had called us to preach the Troas. We put out to sea and sailed straight to Samon Thrace and the next to Apopolis.
From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony. And the leading city of that did there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river of prayer.
[2:20] And we sat down and began to speak to the woman who had gathered there from the city of Thyatira named Lydia. A dealer in purpose, God.

And the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she was baptized, she invited us to her home. And if you consider me a believer in the Lord, she persuaded us.
Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave. She predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by for Paul and the rest of us shouting.
These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said, Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her.
At that moment, the spirit left, realized that their hope of making money was gone. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market authorities.
[3:28] They brought them before the magistrates and said, These men are Jews and are thrown by advocating customs unlawful for us as Romans to accept.

They were sent to attack against Paul and Silas. And the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. Severely flogged, they were thrown into prison.
And the jailer was commanded to guard. They received these orders. He put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in stalks. About mid-might, they were singing hymns to God.
And the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly, the prisoners of the prison were shaken.
At once, all the prison doors flew open and everyone's changed.
And the jailer woke up. And when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted, Don't harm yourself. We're all here.
[4:25] And the jailer called for trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, Sirs, what are you doing? And they replied, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

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Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him. And all the others in the hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds. Then immediately, he and all his household were brought them into his house and set a meal before them.
He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in household. Well, we'll just end there at the end of verse 30. Well, Paul and Silas then are the new team, the new missionary team by the church at Antioch, the church that we looked at this morning, who had been out on an earlier mission.
And Paul and Barnabas had visited Cyprus and then they traveled straight north into the road to some churches and another city called Antioch and another place called Iconium, and then they had traveled back again to Antioch.
Here they are on his second missionary journey. He is trying to discover where he should head down into Asia, where Ephesus was, or whether he should head up towards the Black Sea.
[5:59] But for some reason, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, going in either direction and they kept traveling west until they got to the east coast of Turkey into a place called, as we know it, Turkey now, in Bible times, it was Asia Minor.

It hindered them and there's all kinds of theories about that which is of interest. One of the theories is that Paul wasn't well and they made a beeline to the coast to seek medical help because in Troas, they pick up another member of their missionary team.
And so, Timothy has joined them. So, there's Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke joins them in Troas. If you follow the story of Acts through, you'll see that from Troas onwards, he doesn't talk about them, he talks about we because he joins the team in Troas and we know, of course, that he was a medical doctor.
But the truth is, we don't really know how the Holy Spirit hindered them from going north or south or why they kept traveling west. But when they got to Troas, Paul received the vision of a man in Europe, in Macedonia, just above Greece.
And the man in the dream was begging him to come over and help with the work of the gospel. The missionaries took that as God's leading and they set sail and eventually they arrived in a place called Neapolis, just on the south.
[7:38] And they traveled straight north, up 16 kilometers, 10 miles straight north, to the city of Philippi.

And Philippi is a really interesting place. Again, with the risk of boring you with details, Philippi, historical details, Philippi was the scene of a very fierce battle between troops that were loyal to the Roman Empire and two rebels called Brutus and Cassius.
So, you might have heard of those two characters. And to mark the victory of the troops that were loyal to the Empire over these rebels, Brutus and Cassius, Philippi was granted the status of a Roman colony.
So, it became a city that was governed by Roman laws. The people that lived in Philippi had all the same rights as the people that lived in Rome, in the imperial city itself, the very epicenter of the Roman Empire.
So, Philippi became this outlying Roman colony. And it was a great place to live, a great place to live. I mean, it wasn't a London, but it was an Edinburgh or maybe a Glasgow, and it was just a fantastic place to live.
[9:05] And when the missionaries arrived in Philippi, it seems that they arrived midweek, and they decided, took a day or two to get their bearings, somebody find accommodation, figure out where they could buy some food so that they could keep their body and soul together, and took them a day or two.

And then, on the Sabbath day, we read about them going to a little place down by the riverside. And I want us to think about their missionary activity in Philippi, and I want us to think about the three people that became the first members of the church at Philippi, in my estimation, at least.
I want us to think about this businesswoman, I want us to think about this slave girl, and then, thirdly, I just want us to think about this rough-and-tumble jailer.
So, those are the three people that we're going to camp on this evening. So, first of all, this businesswoman. So, it seems that there were very few Jewish people living in Philippi, because if there had been ten Jewish men, along with their families, they would have been obliged to have started a Jewish meeting house or a synagogue, a place for worship and the reading of the law.

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If there was ten present in that city, they would have been obligated to have started a synagogue. But in the absence of, it would appear, any huge number of Jewish people, there was a group of women who decided that they would meet outside the city down by the riverside, and there they would study and they would engage in worship.
[10:54] So, when these missionaries arrived in town and began to think about, well, where would you start trying to reach a city with the good news of Jesus? And the place to start, of course, would be with people, at least, who believed in God.

That would be a good place to start. And they heard about this group of women down by the riverside, and they heard about these Bible studies that were being led down by the riverside, and you get the impression that this woman called Lydia is the leading light in this little group of women who are having these Bible studies down by the riverside.
Just a few things about this lady, then Lydia. First of all, I want you to think about the fact that she was rich. So, Lydia was not a native of Philippi.
She originally came, we are told, in this passage from the city of Thyatira, which was in the Roman province of Asia. So, actually, not that far from Troas, where Paul received the vision.
Further down the coast towards Troas is where Thyatira was, and that's where Lydia came from.
And it seems that Lydia had gone to Philippi to ply her trade as a seller of purple.
[12:11] She specialized in dyeing garments in a purple color and selling them to whoever wanted to buy them. Of course, Philippi would have been a great place to ply your trade as a seller of purple because the color purple was the color of importance.

It was synonymous with power and authority. And these Roman colonies were populated or filled with retired army veterans, people who had fought in the legions in places like Britannia, trying to keep the picks out of the empire.
And then when they retired, there wasn't enough room in Rome for them all, so they would ship them out to these colonies. And Philippi was full of retired Roman soldiers who wanted everyone to know how important they were.
Did you know that I led my men in a battle here and we won this city and we conquered that place and we had this victory? And so, these people who wanted to communicate something of their importance would love to have bought purple and worn it around Philippi.
So, Lydia was on to a good thing as a seller of purple and it's clear that she was making a fairly substantial living for herself.
[13:32] Not only do we know that she was a seller of purple but we know that she was a successful businesswoman because she had a house that was big enough to accommodate the missionary team.

When she became a Christian, the first thing that she did was persuade the missionary team to come and live in her house with her and we know that there was at least four of them, maybe more, but there was at least four of them.
There was Paul and Silas and we know that Timothy had joined the team and we know that Luke had joined the team and there may have been others involved in that team also. So, she must have had a substantial house to be able to just say to four extra guests, come and live in my house during your time in Philippi.
So, this woman was successful, a successful businesswoman but riches don't provide peace or contentment, do they?
And riches don't provide eternal security. There's a limit to what riches can actually provide and Lydia knew that and that's why we find her on the Sabbath day down by the riverside.
[14:45] John Lennon, who made millions not only through his career in the Beatles but also through the business genius of his wife, Yoko Ono, in a television interview said, I cannot remember a time in my life when I was without sadness.

Despite all of his success and all of his wealth, I cannot remember a time in my life when I was within, when I was without sadness and he said, when we wrote this song, won't you please, please help me?
He said, that actually was the cry of my heart and no one ever came with the answer and provided the help that he needed.
Lydia knew that money had limitations and she knew that there was a God and she knew that one day she would stand before this God and she wanted to discover how to be ready to meet him. So

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the second thing I want you to notice is not only was she rich but she was religious.
Lydia was not a Jew, she was a God-fearer, she did believe in God and not just any God, the God of the Old Testament but she hadn't fully embraced Judaism yet so she's not Jewish, she's just a proselyte if you like, she's somebody who has come to believe in the God of the Israelites, the God of the Old Testament but she hasn't fully embraced him yet and there's no synagogue for her to attend but when she gets to Philippi and somehow she has come into contact in Thyatira with people that did worship Yahweh or worship Jehovah, however you want to put it and when she got to Philippi she could easily have left that behind and said to herself, you know what, that belonged to Thyatira, that belonged to there, now that I'm in a new place pursuing new opportunities I'm going to leave that behind but not Lydia.
[16:51] There's an emptiness in Lydia and she's searching for something to fill that emptiness and she knows that wealth and success and business can't fill that emptiness and so with another little group of women she's studying the Bible down at the riverside but here is the thing that I want you to know about Lydia.

She was religious but she didn't know the gospel and she didn't know anything about Jesus. She had never heard that Jesus had died for our sins on the cross and her heart was still closed to God and to salvation because if God had to open her heart then it stands that it was closed until God did open it.
She was religious but she didn't know Christ and she didn't know God in a personal and saving way and you know it reminds me of John Wesley who went out to Savannah to convert Indians and to preach to the native Indians and preacher now in the pulpit every Sunday preaching and in his diary he wrote I went but who God will save me and for all of his religious activity he read and I don't know Jesus and it wasn't until he went back to London and was sitting in a meeting in Aldersgate Street listening to somebody read a preface of Luther's commentary to Romans that his heart was strangely warmed and he was regenerated and God did something within him.
So Lydia's rich she is religious but she's not a Christian and then I want you to notice that she was responsive. So that Sabbath afternoon the missionaries arrived and Paul is obviously a Jewish teacher he probably had some kind of reputation as a former Pharisee there's no part of the Old Testament that he could not quote or explain so this little group of women who are studying the Old Testament law decide well let's get him on let's hear what he has to say this Jewish teacher who's arrived in town if he knows this Old Testament law and these scrolls that we're studying let's hear him let's hear what he has to say so they get Paul on and I don't know what Paul said to them we're not told in the text what God said to him all we're told is that God opened her heart.
she probably thought that she responded to the message but behind the scenes Luke tells us actually God was at work in her heart opening her heart and drawing her to faith in Christ and I would suggest to you that Paul took them on a tour of the Old Testament and showed them how the whole thing pointed towards Jesus how Jesus is the great high priest how Jesus is the sacrifice that needs to be offered for our sins and then through the prophets how Jesus is the one that was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities how Jesus is the one whose body will not be allowed to see decay I think he would have taken them on a tour of the Old Testament and here's the thing about Lydia this is the first time ever that she has heard about Jesus the first time ever that she's so I mean Paul couldn't expect too much could he by way of response
[20:37] I mean was he really expecting her to respond the first time that she ever heard about Jesus well the first time that she ever heard about Jesus she gave her heart and life to him and put her trust in him God opened her heart and she became a follower of Jesus right there at the riverside the first time that she ever heard about him and not only that but she was baptized she and her whole household we don't know who was involved in her household it was probably her household servants those that were involved in her business with her it's unlikely that she was married because it would have been very unusual for her husband not to have been mentioned in connection with her name so the likelihood is that she is an unmarried businesswoman and her household are her servants and those who are involved in her business with her and all of them are baptized come to believe in Jesus and are baptized what a joy it must have been for Lydia to see not only herself coming to know Jesus but her friends and others in her house with her so I don't know

I don't know everybody here how many times have you heard about Jesus how many times have you heard about Jesus more than once I would say when will you respond to this message and give

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your life to Jesus and begin to follow him why don't you do that tonight like what is it that you're waiting for why don't you commit your life to Jesus tonight and begin to follow him Lydia did it the first time she heard about Jesus well here's the second thing I want you to think about it's the slave girl so the second person I think that was added to the church is the slave girl Paul met her as he's going to and from this place of prayer this place of Bible study maybe it was the following Sabbath maybe it was a Sabbath or two down the road but he met this slave girl and a couple of things I want to just pick up on first of all I want you to think about her demon possession she was demon possessed this girl was able to tell people things about their future somehow she had access to supernatural knowledge she had some kind of clairvoyant ability now the devil it would appear is able to see things that we cannot see he doesn't know everything only God is omniscient
God is the only one that knows the end from the beginning and God is the only one that knows everything all of the time but the devil does seem to be able to see things that others and that we with our finite limited earth centered sense can't see and this girl is tapping into knowledge that belongs to the realm of darkness and she's able to tell things people things about their future it's interesting to notice and of course she's being exploited she's got a bunch of people that are making money from her so this girl is a slave girl she's got these unusual powers but she's being exploited and abused and used for her ability to generate funds for those that ruled over her and it's interesting that it says that she was possessed of a python spirit I find that really interesting that isn't always translated into some of the
English translations but in the Greek text it talks about her being possessed of a python spirit and of course there's a bit of discussion about what that's all about and is that some kind of reference to some sort of Greek mythology I just find it really interesting because what does a python do it's a constrictor isn't it wraps itself around its victims and it squeezes them until it crushes them and I would suggest to you that this girl is being crushed by the powers of darkness and as she's being exploited and abused and used here is a poor broken soul and when she meets the apostle Paul and his team she she's screaming these men are servants of the most high God and who have come to proclaim to us the way of salvation
I you know I just want to say this to you that sometimes when we think about the devil we think oh it's so much fun but actually when you look at the sadness of this girl's life there isn't a great deal of fun this girl's being used and abused and broken here here's the second thing that I want you to notice not just her demon possession but her deliverance these men are servants of the most high God who proclaim to us the way of salvation very interesting although she's demon possessed she is somehow identifying Paul and Silas as servants of God it's really strange isn't it and there's all kinds of discussions about why she's trying to do that why is she trying to create an alliance between herself and these messengers from God who are proclaiming good news about
[26:28] Jesus and I'm not sure why she's trying to do that maybe it's a strategy of the devil maybe the devil is trying to sort of if she's identified with these messengers then maybe no one will listen to them they'll just write them off in the way that they wrote her off I don't know why Paul didn't act immediately I don't know why he took time it seems that he took a period of time before he did anything he just listened put up with it until he got to a point where he couldn't put up with it anymore and in the name of Jesus not his own name his own name counted for nothing in the name and in the power of Jesus he set this girl free now this girl I think her story is told here because I think that she became a player in the church at

Philippi I don't think her story would have been told here otherwise I think that's the reason this text and I think that Luke as he records the book of Acts wants us to see that you know God by his grace can set people free and he can break in and he can transform lives and he can do something different in people's lives and I think sometimes we forget that we had a guy testifying in our church a good few well probably about a year ago or maybe even more he testified at one of our sort of guest services and he spoke about how he was an alcoholic sitting in a flat in Glasgow and just in a miserable low end of sort of miserable state and suddenly God broke in and instantly changed him instantly changed him and put him on a completely different course now
I'm not saying that God always does that but I am saying that God can set people free and maybe you're here tonight and maybe you can identify with this poor slave girl maybe you think to yourself well my life is a bit of a mess that's the truth what a mess my life is and maybe you're wondering could Jesus help me could Jesus set me free I think Jesus could set you free or I wouldn't stand in a pulpit every week I think Jesus could do for you what he did for this girl you know I often think about

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my grandfather who was an alcoholic homeless on the streets of Edinburgh walking the streets not where I am now the pastor of a church it's one anyway it's certainly one of the reasons that I wanted to be involved in ministry in Edinburgh living on sleeping on a park bench occasionally in a hostel I remember he came to live with my mother because he was trying to break free from alcoholism and he could never break free and eventually he would steal stuff and he would sell it in a pawn shop on what he needed to keep himself going and he would move out again and eventually he fell down the stage I you know it's a sad story and I wonder hope is this that he maybe went to one of the free breakfasts in Crubber's Christian Close and maybe he heard how Jesus could forgive him and help him and take him to heaven but I am here to say this to you tonight that Jesus can transform lives in him well the last thing that I want to talk about then is this prison warden so her girl was converted or when she was set free by the power of the gospel she was no longer able to predict the future isn't that interesting no longer tapping into the dark powers that she used to tap into she had been delivered from all of that and the people that were making money from her were upset and eventually

Paul and Silas are reported to the magistrates the magistrates have them beaten and thrown into prison and special instructions are given to the prison warden you make sure you keep these prisoners safe these are important prisoners you mustn't allow these prisoners to escape so just a few things about the prison warden he must have been struck by these singing prisoners don't you think the singing prisoners Paul and Silas had been beaten with rods on their back I mean their backs must have been like a field of jelly black and blue their body must have been in shock they must have been shaking and trembling with the shock of having been beaten absolute agony and when they got into prison and found themselves in the inner sanctums of the prison in stocks and in chains you know they must have been tempted just to sit there in the darkness and have a real pity party just to feel really sorry for themselves look at what we were trying to serve

[32:04] God and look at what God has allowed to happen to us but instead of that what you find is that they are singing for all that they are worth and the reason that they are singing for all that they are worth is because they've got something that external circumstances cannot change in their lives they know that their sins are forgiven they know that they are children of a heavenly father they know that they are in the center of God's will despite the circumstances they know that whatever happens it will be absent from the body and present with the Lord there are so many things that they just know circumstances cannot change and so they're singing about the great blessings of God's grace to them in the prison having been beaten and in absolute agony Spurgeon says it's easy to sing when you can read the notes with daylight but it's only a skillful singer that can sing when there isn't a way of light these missionaries have got peace and it must have made an impression on this prison warden in 1873 after the great

Chicago fire Horatius Spafford decided that his family needed a break in Europe so he sent his wife and his daughters ahead of him to Europe and he had to take care of some last minute business and he would join them later the ship that they were sailing on his wife and daughters collided with a steamship just off the coast of France Mrs.

Spafford was able to have a prayer with her three daughters before they were plunged into the sea and she never saw them again and then she wrote sent a telegram to her husband when she was rescued saved alone was the telegram he immediately heard about the accident and travelled to be with his wife I mean what a meeting it must have been on the shores of France as they just embraced each other having lost their girls I mean what a tragedy but on the way he wrote these words apparently passing the very spot where the girls were plunged into the sea when peace like a river attendeth my way when sorrows like sea billows roll whatever my lot you have taught me to say it is well it is well with my soul and these prisoners in this prison know that it's well with their soul and they've got something to sing about so here's the second thing not just singing prisoners what an impact that must have made on this prison warden but secondly the shaking of the prison Zombie more prisoners vard■r probably so to spare himself the shame and ignomY of that he decided he was going to take his own life and the prisoners then shouted out don't harm yourself we're all here Paul says we're all here no one has escaped said to them well he says, what must I do to be saved? Sometimes God shakes our world to its very foundations, doesn't he? Just to get our attention, because he wants to speak to us. I wonder if God's shaking your world to its foundations to get your attention. Is God trying to speak to you, and you're not listening? And God's shaking your world to get your attention.

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I remember taking a funeral many years ago of a young man who had passed away, and at the service, there was a girl, his neighbor, sitting in the service, and she, sad, devastated by the death of her neighbor, went home that night, and she and her husband were watching television together, and the tears were rolling down her face. And her husband said to her, what's wrong with you? [36:42] And she said to her husband, I'm a terrible sinner, and I'm not ready to meet God, she said. And you know what he said to her? He said, you're not a sinner. I'm the sinner. You're not a sinner. I'm the rascal. She says, no, no, it's me. And she went upstairs and asked the Lord Jesus to be her Savior, and to forgive her, and take away her sin. God had shaken her very world to its foundations, and the loss of her neighbor, and through that got her attention. Is God trying to get your attention?

Well, here's just the last thing, the saving of this prison warden. What must I do to be saved? What must I do to be saved? And some people would have said, well, I'll tell you what you've got to do to be saved. You've got to go to church for the rest of your life, or you've got to do this, and this, and this, and this. But that's not what Paul said. Paul says, you've got to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe that he was the Savior he said he was. Believe that he can do for you what he said he could do. He could forgive you. Take away your every sin. Make you as white as snow in God's sight. Believe on Jesus, and trust him to do it for you. Believe him to do it for you.
Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. And that night, the prison warden and his whole family came to faith in Christ, and they too were all baptized. And, you know, what a night it must have been. He probably said to his wife when he was going out, listen, they've got a couple of rascals. I have to keep them safe tonight. I'll be back in the morning. And he did come back, back in the morning, but what a different man he was when he did come back, completely revolutionized. And his whole family are converted, and his whole family are baptized. You know, one of the great prayers of a Christian parent, one of my great prayers is that when I get to the other side, I get in through the gates of heaven, and I wait there for a year or two, I hope. I'll be waiting for every one of my children to come through the gates, every one of them. My prayer is that none of them will be missing, that all of them will make it by God's grace. My prayer is that the circle will not be unbroken. And I want to see them do well in life, but that's the biggest request that I have of the Lord, that all of them will get through the gates and will be in heaven for eternity.
What a joy it was for this jailer that the circle was not unbroken. His whole family swept into the kingdom by God's grace. And you know, what a lesson for Europe. This is the first church in Europe, and what a lesson there is for the rest of Europe and for the rest of the world. The church is not just for successful businesswomen, although it is for them, but it's not just for them. It's also for the broken and abused, people who are exploited and vulnerable, people who've been wounded. It's for them. The church is for them. Jesus is for them, as well as he is for successful businesswomen who feel the emptiness on the inside. It's for those who are being exploited, the wounded, and it's for these rough and tumble jailers who would give you a bunch of fives as quick as look at you. They too are welcome.
[40:30] We come from every walk of life, and the thing that unites us is our common faith and trust in Christ, isn't it? That's what unites us. And together, hand in hand, no matter where we come from, no matter what our story is. So, I hope that you'll remember the first church in Europe.

The first member was a successful businesswoman girl, and then thirdly, there was a rough and tumble jailer. Well, we're going to sing our song, then I will come back and close in prayer.
So, yeah. I will continue to sing my song.

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