

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 16:16-40

Topic

Paul and Silas exorcise a demon from a possessed slave girl and are imprisoned because it affects the local economy. Prison becomes a place of prayer and praise as they sing unto the Lord.

Title

Sing Sing

Acts 16:16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

Acts 16:17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Acts 16:18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

Acts 16:19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

Acts 16:20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;

Acts 16:21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."

Acts 16:22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods.

Acts 16:23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

Acts 16:24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Acts 16:25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

Acts 16:27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

Acts 16:28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Acts 16:29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Acts 16:31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Acts 16:32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

Acts 16:34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Acts 16:35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

Acts 16:36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

Acts 16:37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

Acts 16:38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.

Acts 16:39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city.

Acts 16:40 So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Introduction

Paul's night in jail was the first of a total of nearly four years he would spend either under arrest or incarcerated during his thirty years of preaching the Gospel. His frequent stints as a prisoner led him to refer to himself as **the prisoner of the Lord** (Ephesians 4:1).

The odds are pretty good you won't be incarcerated for Jesus. But what if you started considering yourself **the prisoner of the Lord**?

There are lots of metaphors used to describe your relationship to Jesus Christ. Christians are compared to ambassadors, builders, stewards, slaves, bondservants, soldiers, and farmers. Each suggests certain essential qualities in your Christian walk.

Prisoners should be on that list. There are certain qualities of prison life that are essential to succeed in the Christian life. For example: A prisoner has limited rights... he is dependent upon his jailer for his most basic necessities... his activities are restricted. Think about it and you can come up with other qualities.

A couple of things will happen when you start to see yourself as the prisoner of the Lord. We see them in Paul's first imprisonment in Philippi. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Set Captives Free When You See Yourself As The Prisoner Of The Lord, and #2 You Set The Church Forward When You See Yourself As The Prisoner Of The Lord.

#1 You Set Captives Free
When You See Yourself As The Prisoner Of The Lord
(v1-34)

Paul always made the most of his incarcerations:

1. The letters to the Colossians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, and to Philemon were all written while Paul was a prisoner. Second Timothy is technically called a pastoral epistle but it, too, was written while Paul was a prisoner.
2. The soldiers who kept guard over Paul were changed at frequent intervals. He shared the Lord with them and there are indications that many of them were saved (Philippians 1:13).
3. During his longer incarcerations he was able to receive visitors. We're told that they were affected by visiting Paul to further the Gospel.
4. He was also able to present the Gospel to some of the highest rulers of the Roman Empire, perhaps even Caesar Nero himself.

He first dons prison garb in Philippi.

Acts 16:16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

This **slave girl** was possessed by a demon. The original text reads, **having a spirit, a Python**. The image of a python guarded the temple of Apollo in Delphi where certain oracles plied their trade. The word came to be used of anyone who practiced things like **fortune-telling** and palm reading. It was also used to describe ventriloquism as these individuals would throw their voice.

Not every so-called fortune-teller is demon-possessed. Most are simply frauds. But people are still possessed, and demons – though fallen – are super-intelligent beings who seem to have some limited knowledge of the afterlife and future events.

Acts 16:17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Even demons can sometimes tell the truth! It's no reason to listen to them or to glean insights from them. Christians sometimes borrow from the occult, changing the names of ancient practices to make them sound and seem biblical. **Let's not!**

Acts 16:18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

Paul was **greatly annoyed**. A better translation would be *grieved*. He was grieved both for the Gospel and the girl.

Why did Paul wait **for many days** before acting? He must have been led by the Lord. God has His perfect timing and we should respect it.

Acts 16:19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

Acts 16:20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;

Acts 16:21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."

They would rather profit from this girls slavery to a demon than see her made whole. Some industries need to be more adversely affected by conversions.

It was unlawful for a Jew to actively proselytize Romans. Luke and Timothy were Romans and looked it; Paul and Silas were Jews and looked it. They played the race card, as we like to say today.

Acts 16:22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods.

Acts 16:23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

Acts 16:24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

All because they had freed a slave girl, not from her masters but from a demon. It reminds me of some of the crazy things going on in our world today. Just this week there was a story that the board of a middle school in Maine voted to make condoms available to children as young as eleven years old. The kids need a note from a parent authorizing the school to provide medical care. But the care – including contraceptive services – is totally confidential.

Bruised, bloodied, and bound in a position that was torturous... **Might as well have church!**

Acts 16:25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Maybe Paul turned to Silas (or vice-versa) at some point and said, "You know what? We're prisoners alright – *prisoners of the Lord!*" They started offering prayers of thanksgiving and singing hymns of praise.

Talk about walking the walk! As **the prisoners were listening to them** they understood something was definitely genuine about these new inmates. How we endure adversity preaches to people. We should embrace it as the prisoners of the Lord.

Acts 16:26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

One commentator poetically suggested that the prison itself thought the Millennium had arrived and was jumping for joy! God sent an earthquake but a very unusual one. The **doors all were opened and everyone's chains were loosed** but there was no real damage to the structure. It was nothing short of eerie.

Note in passing that Paul and Silas do not seem to have been praying to be released. They simply rejoiced and left their release to God.

Acts 16:27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

The Philippian jailer had been sleeping. Suddenly aroused from slumber, and thinking all his prisoners had escaped, he was going to kill himself. A jailer was liable for the security of his prisoners. He would certainly have been killed following their escape – earthquake or not.

Acts 16:28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Why did none of them escape? I say Paul took charge of the situation and told them to stay put. He'll do something like that later in the Book of Acts when, during a storm at sea, he takes charge of the situation and convinces the soldiers and sailors to not abandon ship (Acts 27).

Acts 16:29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Acts 16:31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Acts 16:32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

Who brought the **light**? There must have been additional staff. It also contributes to the ambience of the situation. It was dark and confusing, but in the midst were two fearless men who had taken charge.

The jailer would have known something about the reason Paul and Silas were in his prison. He may have talked with them earlier. Before he dozed off he may have heard them praying and praising. The bottom line was that he knew they had something real and he wanted it.

I'm guessing his house was adjacent to the prison. While the other prisoners were made secure by the staff, Paul and Silas went to the jailer's home. Paul shared the Gospel and the sense of the words are that all of them were saved because all of them believed.

This Q&A is theological dynamite. What does a person need to do to be saved? One thing only – **Believe!**

Believe what? Not what; who! On the **Lord, Jesus Christ**. The names tell the story:

1. He's the **Lord**, the Master of all things; He's God!
2. He's **Jesus**, the Man; He's God in human flesh!
3. He's **Christ**, the Messiah; He's the God-man promised in the Scriptures to come as our substitute and save us.

Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

Acts 16:34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

This was no modern prison where inmates had rights and benefits. Paul and Silas had not been given either medical care or even food.

Where were they **baptized**? We know there was a river about a mile outside the city. Even in their depleted physical condition, Paul and Silas walked two miles round-trip to perform their ministerial service.

A doctrinal note: Some people use this passage to teach that whole households are saved by the belief of the parents and that even infant children should be baptized. Not so! For one thing the jailer was probably a retiree – a soldier living on a pension who retired to a life as a jailer. Then there's the wording of verse thirty-four. It tells us that a person must be old enough to understand the Gospel in order

to believe and be baptized. **Having believed** was what brought individual salvation and led to believer's, adult baptism.

Paul and Silas, prisoners of the Lord, set captives free:

1. They set free a slave girl from her captivity to a demon.
2. They set free a jailer from his captivity to duty when they kept him from committing suicide.
3. They set free the other prisoners by exemplifying the joy of the Lord in the worst possible circumstances.

The slave girl remained a slave; the jailer remained a jailer; the prisoners remained prisoners. But all either received or at least had been exposed to the spiritual freedom a person can enjoy in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

You and I are no less the prisoners of the Lord. The nonbelievers who surround us are held captive by something or someone. When we treat our imprisonments as if they were a prison musical we promote a spiritual freedom that is attractive to those who are perishing without hope.

Our story isn't over...

#2 You Set The Church Forward When You See Yourself As The Prisoner Of The Lord (v35-40)

In the morning the magistrates thought they'd release Paul and Silas and **secretly** kick them out of town.

Acts 16:35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

Acts 16:36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

Acts 16:37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

Acts 16:38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.

Whoops! “Did we mention yesterday that we were Roman citizens? It must have slipped our minds while we were being stripped, beaten illegally, and set in stocks!”

The **magistrates** were in serious legal trouble. You could not treat Roman citizens in this manner.

Why didn't Paul invoke his rights the day before? As hard as it was to keep quiet, he must have been led by the Lord. The lesson for us is that the prisoner of the Lord has no rights. At least he doesn't immediately claim them; or claim them for himself.

Why did Paul invoke his rights now? It certainly wasn't to be vindictive. He doesn't cause any trouble for these **magistrates**; he doesn't sue them.

He invoked his rights in order to protect the church and to set believers forward in the city of Philippi.

Acts 16:39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city.

Paul and Silas would still be a source of unrest to those who felt their livelihood threatened. It would be best if they left the city altogether. But, at the same time, a public escort by the **magistrates** out of town would constitute a public apology. It would put the angry mob on notice that Paul and Silas had done nothing wrong and could even bring trouble from Rome. It put the believers they left behind in a protected state.

Paul and Silas agreed to leave, but not before visiting the church:

Acts 16:40 So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Because Paul and Silas were the prisoners of the Lord they set the church forward:

1. As I just mentioned, the church would be unmolested by the nonbelievers – at least for a time – for fear of Paul and Silas.

2. The jailer and his household had been saved and were new members of the young assembly meeting in Lydia's house. That means they now had a prison ministry!
3. It's not out of the question that the slave girl had been saved. Though we cannot be certain, it is the usual pattern in the Gospels for a person who has been freed from demonic possession to be saved.
4. Perhaps more than a few of the other prisoners got saved.
5. If there was additional staff working the jail, they, too, may have gotten saved.
6. Apparently Luke stayed behind in order to oversee and pastor the church. He doesn't rejoin Paul until chapter twenty when Paul returns to Philippi on his third mission's trip.
7. The believers in Philippi would send repeated financial support to Paul.

All because two men were willing to see themselves as the prisoners of the Lord.

We are more than two men; we are in many places. Let's ask the Lord to work in us and through us to shake-up the places where captives need to discover their spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ.

Calvary Hanford

- being changed to bring change -