

MINISTRY IN PHILIPPI

Acts 16:11-40

The Second Missionary Journey of Paul got off to a poor start. They had left Antioch in Syria and had traveled the entire length of Anatolia, but in all that time, there had not been a single convert. Instead they found the Lord closing doors at every turn. They had come all the way to the coast and now had gotten on a boat heading west. So it was that they came to Europe.

ARRIVAL IN PHILIPPI

11 Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days. (Acts 16:11-12).

Troas took its name from the nearby ancient city of Troy. The two cities are not actually that close to one another. Troas was still a port city; Troy was in the same general area, but located a number of miles to the northeast.

1. A Straight Course: *Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis (16:11).*

The path traveled by Paul and company had been anything but “straight” up to this point. They had been traveling through Anatolia and had found the door shut in each province to which they had directed their steps. When they came to Troas, Paul had a vision. It was of a man from Macedonia and he was asking for help. They took it as a sign from God and they determined to go there. Getting on board a ship, they were taken on a straight course to Neapolis.

2. Neapolis.

The modern port city of Kabala stands astride the ruins of ancient Neapolis. The name Neapolis means “new city.” It was apparently a new city and a new port built to service the region. From here, it is a ten-mile trip inland to the city of Philippi.

3. Philippi: *From there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony (16:12).*

The area was known for its silver mines, dating back to the days of Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great. Philip had named the city after himself. The importance of the city was not only the silver mines but the fact that the city commands a wide plain that serves as a break in the mountains dividing the east from the west. It was because of this strategic location that it became the site of the Battle of Philippi when the murderers of Julius Caesar lost a military victory to Marc Antony and Octavius, thus deciding the fate of the Roman empire and putting an end to the Roman Civil War.

In celebration of this victory, Philippi was made a Roman colony. As such, Roman soldiers were given land in the area and permitted to settle here. This would make Philippi a cut above the surrounding Greek cities. This would now be the home of a number of Roman citizens. As such, these citizens would form an aristocracy that gave them special privileges not enjoyed by the normal inhabitants.

The presence of Roman citizens in Philippi is going to have a decided impact upon Paul's ministry there and, perhaps for this reason, Paul alludes to the idea of citizenship when he later writes an epistle to the Philippians.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21).

A citizen of Rome enjoyed some special privileges over the normal people. A citizen could appeal to the emperor and could come before his throne. We also have that privilege. We have a citizenship in heaven and that means we will one day be transformed into something much greater than this present body of flesh and blood.

If our citizenship is in heaven, then what does that make the local church? It makes the church a colony of heaven.

A SABBATH CONVERT

¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. ¹⁴ And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple

fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵ And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:13-15).

Philippi was a Greek city and a Roman colony. That meant there were both Greeks and Romans living in the city. The people group notably lacking was the Jews. There were few Jews living in the city. In order to have a synagogue, there had to be at least 10 Jewish men. That was not the case in Philippi. There were not enough Jews here to warrant a synagogue.

Paul's normal practice for evangelism was to begin in the synagogue. He would go there on the Sabbath day and he would tell of the One who had come and who had fulfilled the prophecies of the Scriptures. That would not work here. There was no synagogue.

That might have been discouraging news to Paul and his company. They had come hundreds of miles to bring the gospel and now there was nowhere for them to preach it. That Sabbath, Paul made his way out to the banks of the small river that ran past the city. Outside the city gates and still in the shadow of the acropolis of the city, there was located a Roman graveyard past which the river flowed. It would be here that the women of the city would come to draw their water and to do their laundry. This might also serve as a place of prayer.

Sure enough, Paul finds here a gathering of women. He proceeds to tell them of Jesus, that Galilean carpenter-turned-rabbi who was not afraid to speak to a Samaritan woman by a well.

It must have been a dramatic sight. They were under the shadow of the acropolis of the city. Seated near a graveyard, a place of death, they sat by the bank of the river as Paul shared with them the water of life.

1. Lydia listens: *And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening (16:14).*

One of the women who was present that day was a Greek businesswoman named Lydia. She was a worshiper of God. That means she was a semi-proselyte to Judaism.

Lydia wasn't a native to Philippi. It could have been that she was only here on business. She was from Anatolia, the land through which Paul had so recently

traveled and the country in which he had been forbidden to preach the gospel. She was from the city of Thyatira.

That is interesting because we learn in Revelation 2:18 that there would eventually be a church in Thyatira. Who started this church? I do not know. But I suspect it started by a Christian businesswoman named Lydia.

2. The Lord leads: *The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul (16:14).*

If you had been there, you might have thought that Lydia did not need to be converted. After all, she was already a worshiper of God. But she needed the gospel. She needed to have her heart opened.

When you first came to know the Lord, you probably thought that it was your own idea. I certainly did. I was raised in a Baptist church and, like all good Baptists, I became a Presbyterian of my own free will. But the truth of the matter is that no one comes to the Lord unless the Lord has first opened their heart. Steve Brown describes it this way: You take the first step; God takes the second step, and by the time you get to the third step, you find that it was really God who took the first step.

3. Believers and Baptism: *When she and her household had been baptized... (16:15).*

We are told that Lydia heard the gospel and that she believed. Then we are told that both she and her entire household were baptized. There is an interesting omission here. We do not read that her entire household believed. They might have, but we are not told this was the case. And that is okay because Lydia was acting as the head of her household. She believed and she had her entire household baptized as a demonstration that she was committing her entire household to the Lord.

4. The Hospitality of holiness: *“If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us (16:15).*

Lydia’s faith was manifested in a gracious offer of hospitality. She wanted to demonstrate her faith through this act of hospitality. She opened up her home to Paul and to his entire company.

When Paul wants to give a list of qualities that are to describe what is a true

Christian, one of them is that a Christian practices hospitality (Romans 12:13).

A SPIRIT CAST OUT

16 And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling. 17 Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." 18 And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. (Acts 16:16-18).

There is a striking contrast between the action that we have seen up to this point and that which takes place now. It is a contrast between two women. The first woman is Lydia; the second is an unnamed slave girl.

Lydia	Slave Girl
Independent woman	Dependent girl
Business woman	Slave
Worshiper of God	Demon possessed
Made a living by selling purple fabric	Made her owners wealthy by fortune telling
The Lord opened her heart to believe	The spirit of divination was cast out of her

This slave girl had *a spirit of divination* - πνευμα πυθωνος. The Greek word here comes from a word from which we get our word "python." In Greek mythology, the python was a giant snake that was used to guard the oracle of Delphi.

There was a real power at work here and it was not the power of God. This girl was possessed by a demon. Her owners realized a good amount of financial profit in her misfortune. If she was living today, she might have a 1-900 number. She was a valuable commodity because she had a supernatural ability that move of us would love to have.

Her prophecies now began to focus upon Paul and his

Having the endorsement of this spirit-possessed slave girl would be a bit like having a known child molester give an endorsement of your church nursery. There are some endorsements that we ought to avoid.

entourage. She testified that they were servants of God and that they were proclaiming the way of salvation. Was her message true? Yes, it was. And yet, this annoyed Paul. Why? Because people of God are known by both their friends and their enemies and Paul had determined to maintain integrity with those who were true and distance from those who were not.

Jesus made the same sort of determination when demons sought to testify of him. The story is told in Mark 2:23-25. An unclean spirit testified that Jesus is *the Holy One of God!* Jesus rebuked the demon.

There is a lesson here. It is that you need to be careful from whom you accept praise. Jesus would not allow this demon to praise Him. And when the world begins to praise us, we better look out.

A SELF-SEEKING ACCUSATION

19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, 20 and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, 21 and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." (Acts 16:19-21).

Paul and Silas are taken *into the market place before the authorities*. At the center of the marketplace of Philippi was the forum. On the north side of the forum stood a raised platform. It was known as the Bema -- the seat of judgment. It was here that Paul and Silas were brought.

The issue was that Paul had just cast a demon out of the servant girl. Her masters saw this as a financial loss. They do not complain about the financial loss. To do so would be to admit the power of God that had been demonstrated in their midst. Instead they change the subject. They try to make it a racial issue and a political issue. They accuse Paul and Silas of disturbing the peace and add the racial issue by pointing out that Paul and Silas are Jews who are disturbing Romans. For the purposes of this accusation, Luke and Timothy were ignored because they were Greek.

There was an anti-Semitism at work here. It should serve to remind us that Christians never have a right to engage in anti-Semitism. Neither do we have a right to engage in any sort of racism since God is the Creator of all people.

A SADISTIC PUNISHMENT

22 And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; 24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks. (Acts 16:22-24).

Notice the mob mentality that is at work. This all takes place in the public square of the marketplace. The crowd gathers and it moves against Paul and Silas. The magistrates order the two men to be stripped of their clothes and beaten. Shame and pain are mixed together as many blows are inflicted. But that is not all. They are then thrown into prison and their feet are secured in stocks. They will be forced to sit in an uncomfortable position for hours upon end with no relief.

There has been no orderly trial. There has been no careful questioning to see whether the charges have merit. Those in authority have been swayed by the mob and they demonstrate a mob mentality.

A SUPERNATURAL RELEASE

25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened. (Acts 16:25-26).

What would have been your attitude in such circumstances? Beaten, mocked, stripped naked, rejected, and now forced to sit in uncomfortable stocks amidst your own refuse in the most unsanitary conditions imaginable.

And yet, we see that Paul and Silas were involved in prayer and in the singing of hymns of praise to God. Luke adds that *the prisoners were listening to them*. After all, they were a captive audience. They had nowhere else to go. But that is not the only reason they were listening. I think they had come to be impressed with the supernaturally gracious attitude of these two men. This was a captive audience, but I think it likely it was also a captivated audience. How do I know this? Because they did not leave when the doors were opened and the chains fell off.

Luke is careful to tell us that the earthquake took place about midnight. Why does he add this detail. Perhaps it is to bring us to the deepest and darkest part of the night and to show us by way of contrast the faith of Paul and Silas. Even in the darkest dungeon, they were singing the praises of the Lord.

Suddenly the earth began to shake. This is a region that is particularly prone to earthquakes and one took place now. But there was something special about this earthquake. It not only shook the foundations of the prison, it also opened all of the doors and unfastened every prisoner's chains.

This was God's earthquake and it was doing God's work. But I want to let you in on a secret. All earthquakes are God's earthquakes. He is able to take every work of nature and to use it for His kingdom.

There is an interesting parallel between what takes place here and what took place on the cross when Christ died for sins.

The Cross of Christ	Events of Acts 16
Jesus was unjustly accused, beaten and sentenced to death	Paul and Silas were unjustly accused, beaten and put into prison
An earthquake took place at His death	An earthquake took place at midnight
His death broke the bonds of sin	The earthquake broke the chains and the prison doors
Those who are freed by His death become willing servants of the kingdom	Those who were released remained in the prison

A SAVING CONVERSATION

27 And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!"

29 And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:27-31).

The typical penalty for permitting a prisoner to escape was either imprisonment, torture or death. The jailer had been sleeping and, coming awake to see the open doors, he came to the conclusion that those left in his charge had escaped. His first impulse was panic and he prepared to end his own life through suicide. He was stopped by Paul calling to him from inside the prison.

Paul's call speaks from a forgiving heart. After what Paul and Silas had been through at the hands of this man and his countrymen, most of us might have been tempted to delay our call. Would we have been stuttering at this point? Paul did not. He was ready to offer a message of hope to this one who had placed him in the stocks.

The jailer calls for a light and looks for confirmation in the words of Paul. Seeing that the prisoners are all accounted, he asks a question: "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" What led to the question? There were two things:

- The worship of God's people.
- The submission of God's people.

When the world begins to see these two things mirrored in your life, they will begin to ask you the same question. Have you had an earthquake of your soul? Have the chains of your heart fallen off? When that takes place and others begin to see its reality in your life, it will not be long before people begin to ask you, "What must I do to be saved?"

What follows is one of the shortest gospel presentations on record. I have a feeling it is short because Paul had already lain the foundation, explaining who is Jesus and what He had accomplished upon the cross.

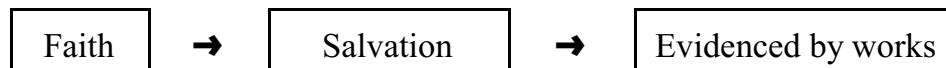
In the early 1970's, I met a young man by the name of Bruce on the campus of Florida Atlantic University. He was a self-proclaimed atheist, but he listened intently as I shared with him the truths of the Bible and of its message of a promised Messiah who had come to die as a sacrifice for sins. At the close of our conversation, I asked him if he would like to come to know Christ and he replied that he would think about it. I did not see him again for about 2 or 3 years and, when I did, he had become a Christian. He told me how someone had come up to him the following week and mentioned Christ and that he had basically asked this same question that is presented in this passage: "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"

Paul does not point out works that are to be worked. He does not say, "Turn over a new leaf and get us out of these stocks and if you are good enough for long enough then perhaps you will make it." He simply calls for faith in Christ.

A SACRAMENT FOR A HOUSEHOLD

32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. 34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household. (Acts 16:32-34).

Notice the evidence of a changed life. The jailer did not merely believe and then put Paul and Silas back into jail. He had a faith that worked. Not that these works of mercy saved him. Paul did not say, “Wash my wounds and give me food and drink that then you will be saved.” You are saved by faith alone and not by works. But you are also saved by faith that does not remain alone and that is evidenced by resulting works. We could chart it out like this:



This faith was evidenced by works of mercy. It was also evidenced by baptism. Just as we saw Lydia and her entire household baptized, so also here we see this jailer and his entire household baptized.

It is interesting to note that, while the New American Standard translation makes it appear that the entire household was baptized because the entire household believed in God, the Greek text does not bear this up. The phrase “having believed” is singular and refers only to the jailer. This is one occasion where other translations do a better job of capturing the Greek text:

RSV Acts 16:34. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

At this point, you might be asking the question, “What about those in the family that might have been too young to believe? How could they have been baptized as a sign of their faith when they were too young to have any faith?”

The answer is that baptism is the counterpart of circumcision -- the Old Testament sign of faith. Why do I say that circumcision was a sign of faith? I say it because the Bible says circumcision was a sign of faith. Romans 4:11 says that Abraham *received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised.*

When were people normally circumcised in the Old Testament? They were normally circumcised as infants. It was not that these infants understood this as a sign of faith, but rather, this reflected a commitment of their parents to identify their children with the salvation provided in God's covenant relationship with His people.

We do the same thing today. When Christian parents have their children baptized, they are saying in effect, "I promise and covenant to raise up my children as Christian children, believing and claiming for themselves the promise of salvation that is found in Christ."

A SCANDAL EXPOSED

35 Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men." 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace."

37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." (Acts 16:35-37).

We have already noted that Roman citizenship was something special and it guaranteed special privileges to anyone who possessed it. One of those special privileges was that no one could lay a hand on a Roman citizen. That wasn't the case with the normal population.

One cannot help but to wonder why Paul did not appeal to his citizenship on the previous day and prior to his having been beaten. Perhaps it had all taken place so quickly that he had been given no chance to make such an appeal. In any case, a serious infraction had taken place and Paul calls into question these actions. Rather than allow a quiet release, Paul demands that the officials of the city come in person to the prison to answer for their actions.

There are some lessons we can glean from this passage:

1. Christians are permitted to hold others accountable for their actions.

Paul points out the sinful and illegal actions of the civil magistrates of Philippi and calls for them to come personally and to make it right. He does not take the law into his own hands and he remains submissive to the legal laws of the land as long

as they do not conflict with the laws of God. But that submission does not negate him being able to stand before those in authority and in being able to point out the impropriety of their actions in the face of their own laws.

2. An appeal to justice can serve to further the cause of Christ.

Although the passage does not state this is the case, I have a feeling that the chief magistrates of Philippi thought twice before they hauled any other Christians off to jail. It could be that Paul's actions served to protect the infant church at Philippi from heavy persecution.

What was at stake was the freedom of the gospel to be preached, not only in Philippi, but throughout all of the Roman Empire. Indeed, as Luke is writing this account, that remains an issue for Paul is awaiting the final outcome of his trial before the Roman emperor.

A SATISFACTORY DEPARTURE

³⁸ And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, ³⁹ and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed. (Acts 16:38-40).

The city magistrates had sought to intimidate Paul and Silas into ceasing their work of evangelism. They could not stop them with a greater message; they could not stop them with greater miracles. They tried to stop them through intimidation. Instead, we see that it is these same city magistrates who became intimidated.

What intimidates you? Do you feel able and ready to share your faith with anyone? Or have you become careful and afraid of what people might think of you? There is a lesson here. It is that we need not be intimidated. Why? Because we serve the God of heaven and of earth and He is able to overcome all attacks, both physical and spiritual.