

Sunday, June 7, 2026

## The Power of the Gospel

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Acts 16:11-40 (ESV)

### - MADE A WAY

- That song will always make me think about the day that Fletcher was born.
- Rachel was about a week away from her due date and went in for her routine midwife appointment and they noticed her blood pressure was just a smidge high
- No one was really worried about it but they had to send her to Catawba Valley for a couple of tests.
  - As soon as we got there her blood pressure was fine but it was mandatory for her to stay a couple of hours
- So we're sitting there planning what we were going to get for dinner, which was probably Chipotle

- But then the nurse comes in —and says that they need to order an ultrasound because Fletcher's heart rate was dropping every once in a while and they weren't why
- So they do the ultrasound, which seemingly took forever...then finally the doctor tells us that with each minor contraction that Rachel was having— (so minor that she couldn't even feel them) —Fletcher's heart rate was dropping
- And they would know why until after he was born. As we're discussing options, his heart rate was dropping more and faster and before you know it we are preparing for an emergency C-Section
- And I am frazzled, I run out to the car to get the go bag, I'm calling my brother and my mother-in-law and I'm so frazzled that I get off on the wrong floor twice...and it's only a 3 story building!

- Then they get me scrubbed up...but I have to wait by myself in a waiting area right outside of the O.R.
  - And the hardest thing I've ever had to see in my life was my wife being wheeled in on that bed to the O.R. with me having to be on the other side of the glass not having a clue about what was going on
- And all I can think to do is just rock back and forth and sing some worship songs
  - And the main one that came to mind was "You....made a way. When our back was against the wall, and it looked as if it was over. You, made a way....and we're standing here. Only because you made a way:
  - "Cuz you move mountains....you cause walls to fall"
  - "With Your Power...perform miracles"
  - "And there is nothing...that's impossible"
  - "And we're standing here...only because You made a way"
- There are those times when you are so hopeless and helpless, all you can do is cry out to God.
  - And in those moments, sometimes you get to a point where you stop just begging Him for something and you start just praising Him.
  - Because deep down you know that there is nothing more powerful than declaring His Name, His Character, and of Who He is!
- And I can't imagine how much of an idiot I looked like in that moment, when nurses would walk through the room and me just rocking back and forth signing out loud!
- But it's all I knew to do in that moment
- And Paul and Silas knew exactly what that was like. In our passage today in Acts chapter 16: They had been beaten and tortured and locked up in a dark dungeon...but verse 25 says:
 

***"About midnight Paul and Silas were***

***praying and singing hymns to God...* -Acts 16:25 (ESV)**

- But first, let's pray together...and then we'll walk through how they found themselves in this predicament
- PRAY
- So last we talked about how Paul, Silas, and the team had tried to go and minister in a few different places in Asia Minor but the Holy Spirit did not permit
  - They were told "No" to the plans that they had made
- And one night Paul gets a vision from the Lord of man in Macedonia asking them to come help them
- So they make their way to Macedonia and end up in Philippi which was the largest city in Macedonia
- Philippi was a very important city within the Roman Empire.

- Philippi had valuable gold mines and it controlled the main traveling route between Europe and Asia
- Many people referred to Philippi as "Little Rome"
- There wasn't much of a Jewish population there as it was made up of mostly Roman and Gentile people
  - In fact, there was a very large population of retired Roman soldiers that were there that served as a sort of extra protection for this important city
- Now, since there was not much a Jewish population, there would not have been any Synagogue's around...which is normally the first place that Paul would go to share the Gospel
  - That was the pattern, to the Jew first, and then to the greek
- But in cities like this where synagogues weren't present, there would spots known as "places

of prayer” where those with Jewish backgrounds, or those interested in the Jewish faith would congregate...normally by a source of water because of the purification rituals that they had

- And they would have small gatherings in these “places of prayer” were they would come together pray, read the bible, and worship the God of Israel.
- So this is where Paul and Silas go first:  
***“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the***

***Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.” -Acts 16:13-15 (ESV)***

- So, throughout this passage we are going to see various ways in which the Gospel can move in Power. And first, here we see:
  - **THE POWER OF CONVERSATION**
  - Luke gives us the detail that they sat down with them...so Paul didn’t get in front of them and preach to them
    - This is a smaller gathering, and they sit down and are just talking with them— It’s also amazing to note that these are all women that they are speaking to.
  - Paul, gets a bad wrap sometimes about some of the things that he had written about women, which most people don’t know the actual context of...and we may or may not get to that later in our study
  - However, there’s a reason why this gathering was just women. Because most every Jewish man, would show up to this place of prayer

and see that it was all women and immediately leave

- Especially if there were Gentile women present. You remember how much it threw off the disciples when Jesus was talking with the Woman at the Well.
- But the Gospel was changing things...and it didn't phase Paul that this was a small group of women— souls were souls, and he was to share the Gospel with every man woman and child from any region that would listen
- And one of those women who listened was Lydia:
  - Lydia was a business women who worked in the fashion world.
  - She was referred to as a seller of purple, and she obviously would have been very successful because the only people at that time that could afford purple clothing or dye were the wealthy and the royalty.

- So this is a woman who would have been very connected and had a lot of high profile clients
- She was not a Jew, she was from just north of Ephesus, but she is referred to as a worshipper of God or more accurately a “God Fearer”
  - This was a term for those who were not of Jewish decent but they desired to follow the God of the Bible.
- Now this would have been counter cultural for her, because most of her client base and people that she associated with would have been followers of classic paganism
  - And in this area, the 2 main forms of paganism that people predominately followed was —Stoicism and Epicureanism
- The Stoics believed that the best way to get through life was not to love anything too much
  - They were to detach their heart...which is why they were referred to as Stoics.

- They believe that as a person you were to get through life as strong as possible.
  - A common practice among stoics was that when they would hold their children, and begin to swell up with that love and affection...they would say out loud to themselves “Remember, you are going to die”
- They couldn’t let themselves get too attached, they had to keep themselves grounded and reminded that everything ends so that when things did end or if things went wrong, they wouldn’t be too hurt
- They could remain strong
- Now, the Epicureans believed that this life was all there is. When you die, nothing happens, that’s it.
- Therefore, they believed you should just live this life in whatever way makes you happy.
  - Do whatever feels right, whatever gives you pleasure, because it’s all over once you go into the ground.
- But Lydia was looking for something deeper than that. Something with deeper meaning... and she somehow knew that the God of Israel could provide that —and was just trying to do everything that she could to learn more about Him.
- And now she was truly about to encounter Him, through the intentional conversation about Him, with the apostle Paul.
- She was living proof of the promise in Jeremiah 29 when the Lord said: ***“You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart.” -Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV)***
- And again verse 14 says. ***“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” -Acts 16:14b (ESV)***

- Now, that term “pay attention” is translated differently in almost every translation: It can be translated, “attended to,” “respond,” “heed,” ...but my favorite way that this term can be translated is that “The Lord opened her heart to be attracted to what Paul was saying”
- Yes, this faith, this Gospel, the message of Jesus is attractive...because it offers things that nothing else in this world can offer
- One historian pointed out that one of the things that made Christianity so attractive to people in this region at this time was the fact that the dominate forms of paganism were so empty.
  - They were completely selfish. One was all about making sure you didn't get hurt. The other was all about making sure that you were happy.
  - And their entire belief system was based around their feelings...and the longer you follow that way of life the more empty you end up
- Because no matter how “stoic” you made yourself you were still going to get hurt
- No matter how happy you try to make yourself, you'll still going to be sad
  - And if there is nothing more than that, there is nothing to pick you up or strengthen you when your plan for stoicism and happiness didn't work!
- And Lydia, found her something more:
  - The woman who worked in beauty had never encountered anything more beautiful than the Gospel
  - She encountered the Love of which there is none greater than the fact that Jesus had laid down His life for her
  - The beauty of a life promised that is so much more than herself
  - The Beauty of the Truth that God came to the planet, in the Person of Jesus and bridged the gap between her and her Creator that sin

created with a cross. And now He is alive and calling her into His family.

- And she encountered this through intentional-gentle, conversation —and the Lord opened her heart to the beauty and the power of the Gospel.
- So, she and her household, which most likely refers to the servants that worked within her house (the way this is written and context leads us to believe that she didn't have a family of her own)—but all those within her house get baptized—and she immediately wants to serve!
  - She doesn't say, well let me feel this out a bit and see what suits me the best
    - No, she wants everything that she is and everything that she has to serve the Kingdom!
  - And she offers her house—not just for a place for Paul and his crew to crash, but as the meeting site for the church that was going to be formed there in Philippi
- And when it says that “she prevailed upon them,” that language means that she won the debate
- It looks like Paul tried to argue with her...but Lydia is a feisty one, and there was no telling her no!
- So this new church planting team is off to a great start! They have Lydia, her friends from the place of prayer and those working in her house. They have a meeting place for when they're ready to get things going!
- But Paul and Silas are still out building the team:
  - ***“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” And this she kept doing 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.” -Acts 16:16-18 (ESV)***

- Here we see: **THE POWER OF JESUS’ NAME**

- Here we have a girl, who is not a successful fashionista by any stretch—but a slave girl.
  - This is a girl had intentionally been given up on and sold by her parents.
  - At this time she is most likely anywhere from 10-14 years old.
  - Who knows how long she had been a slave girl, but at some point she had been exposed to some sort of witchcraft or dark arts that led her to demonic possession.
- In the original language Luke tells us that she had the spirit of the python, which wouldn’t have meant much to modern readers, but ancient greek readers would have known exactly what that meant.

- In greek mythology the Oracle of Delphi was a great fortune teller that had the Pythia serpent or dragon that guarded her
  - Legend has it that the serpent was slain by Apollo who then captured Delphi, known as the Pythia, and she became famous for delivering prophetic message that she would instruct Apollo with.
- Therefore anyone who had fortune telling abilities would be referred to as having the spirit of pythia or the spirit of the python.
- And those possessed by these spirits were actually the first ones referred to as ventriloquists—which makes sense because this demonic spirit was essentially using this little girl as a puppet.
- And those with these spirits were know to have their voices change when these demons would speak through them
- So this slave girl would at one moment have the voice of a child, but then would have this

deep ominous voice when the demon would speak through her to tell a fortune

- And these fortunes would come to pass and her owners would make a great deal of money off of this little girl.
- And when Luke says that this spirit through this girl was crying out...it can also be translated as shrieking
- She was shrieking ““These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”
- Now by doing this, this demonic spirit was doing a few things
- 1. It was mocking them
  - However, the statement it was saying was true...but that’s what the demonic influences do. They mock the truth to try and confuse people
  - Because the reality is that the devil and his demons know the truth better than we do.

That’s why James says that even the demons believe and tremble.

- Also, this spirit was also trying to associate itself with Paul and Silas in order to confuse people into thinking that they were on the same level
- We have to remember that the enemy, in most cases does not operate in blatant lies, but rather in manipulated truth...which is much more diabolical
- And verse 18 says that after several days Paul gets annoyed...Which isn’t a great look for Paul, right?
- Because you would want the passage to say, “Paul, moved with compassion for this little girl...and angry at the spirit for tormenting her”
- But it doesn’t—it makes Paul seem to be a little bit cold here
- But, I understand Paul’s annoyance here:
- I can’t remember if I’ve ever told this story from stage before...but a lot of Pastor shy away

from stories like this—heck, I shy away from stories like this sometimes because it can weird people out

- However, if we are going to experience some of the movements of God that I believe that we are going to experience we have to understand the reality of spiritual warfare
- And I remember years ago, I was really growing in my faith, I was really seeing God move in power for the first time in my life...really experiencing Him in new ways
  - Ministry was awesome there were a lot of great things going on.
  - But in that season I was getting attacked, spiritually a lot.
- And it got to a point that multiple times a week, I would have some really dark disturbing dream, and wake up with something hold me down and I would have to struggle and wrestle until I could finally get the Name of Jesus out of my mouth and then I would get released
  - Now it was happening so often that I had started to get scared before I went to sleep... it made me afraid to go to bed
  - Until one night, after about a month of this going on....it happened again, I squirmed, I struggled, I got Jesus' Name out, rebuked it, and then rolled over and got comfortable.
  - And at that moment, I wasn't afraid anymore...I was annoyed now.
  - And after that was when it stopped happening...and I think that the Lord allowed me to go through that experience to understand that the enemy is nothing for us to fear....we are something for them to fear.
- When we walk in the Power of Jesus' Name, there is nothing more terrifying to the enemies of hell
- I saw a clip from a podcast going around from a guy who had formerly been in the occult. And he explained that the reason that he knew that Christianity was true was because it was the only religion that the occult was afraid of.

- They didn't fear Islam or Muhammad, the didn't fear Buddha or Hinduism, the didn't fear Joseph Smith...because why would you be afraid of dead men??
- No. They fear the Risen Jesus and the Power in His Name and the sad thing is that in most cases the occult understands the Power of Christianity more than most Christians do.
- Paul, annoyed with this Spirit tells it "In the Name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her." And it had no choice but to comply
  - As Dr Tim Keller described: Paul, by saying in the Name of Jesus Christ—He's saying, "Jesus' Name is greater than your name. Jesus' power is greater than your power. So get out."
- And I'm expecting next, to read something along the lines of, "And then a great wonder filled the people and they praised God and rushed the apostles, and then the religious leaders got jealous and mad!"
- That had been the pattern pretty much everywhere up to this point...but Philippi is different:
  - ***"But when her 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 magistrates, 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." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks."* -Acts 16:19-24 (ESV)**

- So when the owners of the slave girl realized that they weren't going to make any money off of her anymore—they take Paul and Silas to the magistrates
  - These were the rulers of the colony—Rome would set up two magistrates in each colony to maintain the civil order
  - These were the guys in charge of Philippi—they were like the mayors and judges of the city
  - To be a magistrate in Philippi, in “Little Rome” was a big deal! These guys felt as if they had made it! This was *their* town!
- And Paul and Silas are dragged before them—falsely accused—and they say, “Go ahead, beat these out of towners, show em how we do it here in Philippi.”
  - No trial, no investigation, nothing
- They stripped them of their clothes, publicly humiliated them, and then beat them with rods within an inch of their life.
  - It's almost as if this is amusing for the magistrates—and after “many blows” Luke says—they say, “Ok, ok, that's enough...go put them in jail and make sure that no one kills them tonight.”
- But the Jailer doesn't just take them to jail
- He takes them to the *inner prison*:
  - This was the darkest and dampest section of the prison, this is a part that the sunlight would never hit, and would be freezing cold
- Then he has them put in stocks:
- Now, these wouldn't be the stocks that you would picture at like a renaissance festival
  - These stocks were long wooden board with holes all along them so that they could have various distances that they could lock your legs apart from each other
  - So they would stretch the legs just far enough a part to put so much strain on your joints, muscles, and hips that it would be impossible to be comfortable and would

cause constant cramps and spasms of the muscles

- It was a form of torture
- So Paul and Silas are in the coldest-darkest cell that they have, already backs busted up and bleeding everywhere, and their laying on the cell floors with their legs contorted—while they are constantly cramping
- And yet, verse 25 says: ***“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and 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 bonds were unfastened.” -Acts 16:25-26 (ESV)***
- Here we see: **THE POWER OF PRAISE**
- When Luke says that the other prisoners were “listening” to them, in the original language that means, “To listen intently”

- The other prisoners have their interests peaked, they are genuinely intrigued by this kind of faith that they are singing praises to God in the midst of their pain
- That’s not something that they have ever seen before! Now, this was a very expressive culture in these times. People didn’t hide their emotions, they enhanced their emotions.
- They didn’t just cry, they wailed. They didn’t just get mad, they gnashed their teeth. They didn’t just mourn, they tore their clothes
- That’s what people were used to seeing.
- Now, Paul and Silas had been stripped and beaten, were currently being tortured—why? Because they freed a girl from a demon?!
- They should be seething! They should be gnashing their teeth!
- But instead their Praying and Praising God!
  - They’re saying “Lord we know you have a plan! We know that you are good! We know

that we got Jesus...and we got that joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart!”

- This is wild to the other prisoners! And they’re listening intently to them —until all of the sudden, the ground starts shaking, walls start cracking, the ceilings cave in, and all of the chains of the prisoners fall off!
  - Not Just Paul and Silas’ but everyones!
- Sidenote: Your praise affects the people around you. When you praise through your pain, you never know how that can impact someone else’s life.
  - If you’re just a fair-weather praiser—no one is going to take you seriously
  - But when you seem to have everything going against you, when your back is against the wall, when people demean you, when you’re hurting, when you’re broken, when you’ve been lied about! Do you praise then?! Do you find your strength and resolve from Him?!

- People say, “Kenny, how are we supposed to do that?”

- And my question is: “What else are we supposed to do?!”
- What else were Paul and Silas supposed to do??— Were they just supposed to be mad, gnash their teeth and yell the whole time? What good would that do?
- No, they knew the situation that they were in. They knew that they could be killed that very next morning, but you know what? They’re hope wasn’t in their mortal bodies.
  - Their hope wasn’t in this life
  - Their hope wasn’t in their feelings, their happiness, or their ability to not get hurt
- No, their hope was in the Risen Savior —that promised them a life beyond this one. Who’s resurrection made it possible for death to actually be a gain because this life is but a vapor

- And if this was to be their last night on earth, they were going to spend it sharing the hope that they have with the other prisoners in that place—who don't have that hope
- So when everything seems to turn against us in life, because we live in a broken, battered, destructive world corrupted by sin.
  - Are we supposed to pout? Be mad? Lash out at God?
  - Or are we to praise Him that this broken world isn't our home?
  - Do we thank Him that there is hope at the end of all of this?
    - Do we count the present suffering not even worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us??
  - Do we appreciate Him that He is with us, carrying the burden with us?
- How we respond to adversity will be the greatest testimony to how real our faith

actually is...and when it's authentic, people will intently pay attention to it.

- And who knows who else can be freed from their chains, because of the way that you praise
- All of the prisoners that were intently listening to Paul and Silas were freed from their chains, and the Jailer comes in looks at all of the wreckage caused by the earth quake
- ***“When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”***  
***-Acts 16:27-29 (ESV)***

- Now this Jailer was someone completely different than anyone else that they had encountered
  - This is not a man that they could have had a spiritual conversation with
  - This man was retired military, and he was a brutal man
    - You see that by the way he went beyond what he was ordered to do with Paul and Silas
  - And Paul is always looking for someone to reach with the Gospel, but even he probably didn't have the Roman Jailer on his mind as one that could be.
  - He's probably thinking about the other prisoners, or waiting a trial where he could publicly share...he knows it's not over, but he never could have guessed the way that this played out.
- Assuming all of the prisoners had escaped, the jailer was going to do what was considered the

honorable thing at that time and fall on his sword.

- But Paul stops him, because somehow Paul had made all of the prisoners, even though they were free, stay right where they were
- And the person that would have been the least likely to come to faith, fell down at their feet, asking about the way to salvation.
- The response in the face of affliction wasn't just praise for Paul and Silas:
  - They were kind to this jailer who was unkind to them
  - The showed mercy to the merciless
  - The showed care for the cruel
- And it completely changed the jailers life. He takes them to his own home, he personally cleans and bandages their wounds
  - He, his household, and his family all listen to the Gospel at they are all baptized

- And they spend the rest of the night, eating and rejoicing together
- Now, I don't know if they went back to the jail in the morning or if they stayed at the jailer's house but verse 35 says: ***“But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.”- Acts 16:35-36 (ESV)***
- Now, why the sudden change of heart from the magistrates? They didn't care about Paul and Silas...they had them beaten publicly for sport
  - I doubt the jailer, went to bat for their behalf, his position didn't talk to those in higher positions like that
- It had to be Lydia right??
  - Lydia is a person with a list of connections with people in high places
- When they got arrested, maybe she had helped dress the mother of one of the magistrates, or was close with a wife—or went way back with a high ranking official
- She *had* to have been the one who worked her connections to get them released...but even after calling in these favors...verse 37 says:
  - ***“But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.”- Acts 16:37 (ESV)***
  - Paul! What are you doing! We're getting you released, just take the win and go quietly!
  - But Paul wasn't going to go quietly. And he knew what he was doing. He knew that the way that they had treated him as a born Roman Citizen was illegal and could get them in a lot of trouble

- But also my question is: Paul why didn't you tell them that before??
- It's like he intentionally kept this information to himself, and allowed himself to go through the beating and the stocks
- But you know, because he did that—now the church would have a cover of protection
  - They would realize, “Oh this isn't just some group of Jews stirring up trouble , these are Roman Citizens...and the magistrates knew they messed up:
- ***“The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.” -Acts 16:38-40 (ESV)***
- It could be too that because the magistrates were afraid Paul and Silas might talk about the way they were treated— if anyone had any problems with the church in Lydia's house in the future...the magistrates would make them leave them alone
- But these were the beginnings of the church in Philippi and we see the Gospel impacting every part of it's society
  - The foundation of this church was started with 2 very different households. That of a rich businesswoman and her servant, and a blue collar jailer and his family.
  - We don't know for sure what happened to the slave girl— if her owners had cast her off, surely that church would have taken her in— but we don't know for sure....but we do know that she was still impacted
- And in this chapter, in the city of Philippi we see the Gospel impacting high class, low class, and middle class

- We see the Gospel impact an Asian, a Greek, and a Roman
- We see the Gospel impact spiritually receptive, the demonically oppressed, and the indifferent
- The Gospel is for everyone, everywhere, in any situation!
- And I love so much that the 3 people that were highlighted in this account were Lydia, the slave girl, and a Roman jailer
- Why do I love that? Because in those days, it was common for a Jewish male to have a daily morning prayer. And these Jewish men would wake up every morning, get ready for the day, and before they left the house they would pray “Lord, thank you that you have not made me a woman, a slave, or a gentile.”
- And who does the Gospel impact in Philippi first?? A woman, a slave, a gentile—And you know that the result of that was? The launch of the what was arguably the healthiest church in the entire new testament
- Paul would go on to tell us how they became the most generous church that he knew
- Also out of all of his epistles, his letter to the Philippians is the only letter he ever wrote that did not have a rebuke or correction in it
- They were the most joyful, generous, and healthy church that he started and it all began with the Holy Spirit telling them no—their original plan.