

Sermon Series "Acts" - The Gospel Enters Europe
Acts 16:11-24 / Acts 16 & Philippians
Colebrook Congregational Church
August 6, 2017 / Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

This chapter sees another change in the Book of Acts, where Paul & Silas cross over to Europe and convert the first European Christian in the city of Philippi. While there, they encounter a clairvoyant slave-girl who recognized them for who they were; they convert a cloth merchant, whose home became a house church; and they were thrown in jail, where they end up converting their jailer.

And this chapter also correlates to Paul's Letter to the Philippians, written many years after his visit from a prison cell.

The chapter begins with Paul's second missionary journey in progress and the introduction of Timothy. Paul meets Timothy and wants him to join them. He was of mixed heritage- a Jewish Christian mother and a Greek father, who became a frequent companion of Paul, he was Paul's trusted messenger, and the recipient of I & II Timothy, and later, he became the Bishop of Ephesus.

The trio traveled from church to church delivering the decision of the Council of Jerusalem, which Timothy was presented as the personification of the diversity and unity of the early church.

It is the Holy Spirit who directs the trio of missionaries and empowers them, and at this point, She does this by closing doors in Asia Minor instead of opening them. Paul's plans, that he had suggested to Barnabas in the last chapter, were being frustrated. He went all over western Asia Minor. From Phragia to Galatia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, then passed by Mysia, ending up in Troas.

This was all made clear to Paul with a vision when they made it to Troas. In it, he saw a Macedonian who pleaded with him to come over to Macedonia and help them. That is where the Spirit wanted them to go, and Paul immediately responded to Her, and the trio sailed from Troas and traversed to Philippi, a major Roman city in Macedonia.

In Europe at that time, there was less of a Jewish population. Apparently in Philippi, there wasn't a synagogue in the city, only a place of prayer outside of it by a river, with the assumption being that the city lacked a quorum of ten Jewish males; so it was an informal setting allowing Paul to mingle with the Gentiles as he acted like the guest rabbi.

Among the Gentiles was a woman named Lydia, a high-end cloth merchant & homeowner, and God opened her heart to what Paul preached. She, and her household, were then baptized; and then her home became a House Church and she became a leader of that Church, and she was mentioned repeatedly in Paul's Letters.

On an other day, Paul & Silas were minding their own business on the way to the place of prayer, when a divining slave-girl started to follow them around for days, proclaiming them as servants of God and Preachers of Salvation. A true statement, but Paul was very much annoyed, because the source of her power was unclean and unholy, a pythian spirit, like the famous Delphic Oracle. Also, to Romans and Greeks, they associate "Most High God" with Zeus, so Paul wanted to put a stop to that, so he did; with a quick exorcism.

Now the owners of the slave-girl were upset by this, because they could no longer exploit the girl using her divinations to make money. The greedy charlatans seized the pair and dragged them publicly to the authorities.

The charges they bring are not only based on greed and anti-Semitism, but also on the agreement between the Romans & the Judeans. After all the revolts, the Romans allowed them to keep their Temple sanctified and exempted them from having to worship the emperor and other pagan deities...as long as they stopped revolting, stopped causing disturbances, and did not proselytize in Roman colonies...like Philippi. The charlatans are saying that the pair were violating this.

So, the magistrates ordered the pair stripped and beaten in public, then thrown into jail, all without proper due process.

While they were in jail, they loudly sang hymns and offering prayers to God. So, Paul & Silas were doing what exemplary believers should do while waiting for God to Act. Then there was a powerful earthquake that shook loose all the cell doors and chains.

Even though they have been mistreated there, placed in the deepest cell, and their feet were in stocks, they did not leave, because if they did, the jailer's life was forfeit. In fact, no one left. The others have heard the witness of Paul & Silas, and they have seen God's answer.

Then their jailer comes to the forefront of the story. The earthquake had woken him and his first reaction was to try to kill himself. The reason for this reaction, without even checking on the prisoners, was because of his pagan beliefs, where earthquakes were seen as divine intervention and judgment, in this case, against him. That's why he asked how he could be saved when Paul stopped him.

Paul told him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and will be saved, you and your household." Then they preached to him, and baptized him and his family.

Then, the next morning, the magistrates told their enforcers to release Paul & Silas. No reason was given...maybe Luke didn't care or felt that it didn't matter. Anyway, the jailer told Paul & Silas that they were being freed. Paul's response reflects the honor vs shame culture of that time. He did not want the magistrates' shameful public behavior to be swept aside privately. He responded with a list of his humiliating grievances: public flogging, public condemnation, and incarceration without a trial & defense attorney. Doing all that to a Roman citizen without a trial is illegal, and to do it all publicly is a capital offense. That's why the magistrates were afraid when they heard that Paul & Silas were Roman citizens.

The magistrates apologized to Paul & Silas and asked them to leave the city. Symbolically, this demonstrated that the might of Rome is unable to subvert the work of God's Salvation, and even the great Empire must come hat in hand to the prophets of the Most High God.

This incident was so powerful to the believers in Philippi, that many years later, when Paul had been thrown in jail again, the Philippian Church responded with prayers and a delegation to deliver gifts that supplied for his and Timothy's needs, and Paul wrote a letter of appreciation for his dear friends. The horrific treatment that Paul suffered in their city had such an affect that they were again horrified and sought to comfort him when he was again imprisoned.

Instead of leaving immediately, they returned to Lydia's House and made sure they were suitably encouraged before leaving. Lydia's home was now the Meetinghouse for the believers in Philippi.

While Lydia was a god-fearing seeker, the unnamed jailer was a pagan, attached to the city prison, the very symbol of the opposition to the Church's mission. He represented that the Gospel message was expanded to include pagans, that God was calling them out of the spiritually desolate areas, full of evil spirits, moral rogues, and anti-Semitism.

Together, those two households display the universal scope of God's grace, that it is accessible to anyone, no matter what.

What's more, is the example of Paul & Silas, who kept their faith through their tribulations and even went farther and preached and witnessed and brought people literally out of their dark prisons and into the light of the Good News. Their experiences should be an inspiration to us all, to keep our own faith strong and joyful, in the face of any adversity.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer:

Holy Spirit, help Your people to be of one heart and soul, that our proclamations, our witnesses, and our outward faiths resonate with great power. May we feel Your strength whenever we face adversity, so we can endure joyfully. We thank You for this and for Your grace You gift upon us all. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

Loving God, We ask for the gift of Your Holy Spirit to help us pray as we ought, offering up to You our thanks and prayers for Your creation, its nations, and peoples, for your church, for ourselves and all in need.

We give You thanks for all Your gifts to us—for food, for health, for each breath we take; for Your guidance, for our Joys, and for our loving friends and families. And thank You for all who have sacrificed of themselves for us.

We ask Your forgiveness, for sins known & unknown. We pray to You in our weakness, because we cannot go through life's troubles unscathed. We are stressed and strained, but we know that we can do better and be more aware of ourselves and of those around us.

We pray for the energy and vision of Your Spirit, for those who are tiring in the battle against injustice and oppression; for those exhausted by the struggle with poverty and hunger. We ask for the hope and comfort of Your Spirit, for those whose lives are overshadowed by illness or pain; for those whose lives are darkened by sorrow or bereavement. We ask for the peace and joy of Your Spirit, for those living in the shadow of war and violence; for those eaten up by guilt and anxiety and whose life has become hard and dry. We ask for the guidance and strength of Your Spirit, for those uncertain how to use their time, talents and gifts; for those tempted to do what is wrong. We ask for the love and courage of Your Spirit, for those reaching out to comfort the distressed; for those reaching out to others with the Good News.

Help us to see Your presence in the hearts of others; grant that we may all be united in a fellowship of love and prayer; give us the courage to respond to the needs of the world, give us the stamina to follow You, to be Your hands and heart in the world; and enable us to witness to Your grace and mercy.

We also pray for:

The Suddath Family Deanna Muzzulin Sue Kenny Sean Larose

We offer these prayers in confidence and trust, as well as the prayers of our hearts up to you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 119:17-32

Deal bountifully with your servant, so that I may live and observe your word. Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I live as an alien in the land; do not hide your commandments from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your ordinances at all times. You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments; take away from me their scorn and contempt, for I have kept your decrees. Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes. Your decrees are my delight, they are my counsellors.

My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to your word. When I told of my ways, you answered me; teach me your statutes. Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works. My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word. Put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me your law. I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your ordinances before me. I cling to your decrees, O Lord; let me not be put to shame. I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding.

Acts 16:11-24

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us.

One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, 'These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.' The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

[Sermon covers Acts 16]

[<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=368986879>]

**Apostle Paul's
Second Missionary Journey
49 - 52 A.D.**

