

The Gospel Moves Into the Continent of Europe

Acts 16:11-40

Acts 16:11-15: *“Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis,¹² and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.¹⁴ Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.¹⁵ And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us.”*

Background Notes

Thus far in the book of Acts the gospel has spread according to God’s plan. In Acts 1:8, just before His ascension, the Lord said to the disciples: *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”* The gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, and then the word moved out to Judea and Samaria. Then the gospel spread into the Gentile world through the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Now the gospel was moving into the continent of Europe. This was all according to God’s plan.

God Himself prevented Paul, Silas, and Timothy from preaching the word in Asia and Bithynia, as we saw in the first part of this chapter. The Lord wanted Paul to stop at Troas and add Dr. Luke to his missionary team. Then, in response to the “Macedonian vision,” the team moved into Europe with the good news of Jesus Christ.

They set sail from Troas, and with favorable winds, they covered the 120 miles to the mainland port city of Neapolis in a relatively short time. They then moved inland about 10 miles to Philippi, one of the main cities of Macedonia (northern Greece today). Paul would normally have headed to the synagogue, but ten Jewish men were required to start a synagogue, and apparently Philippi did not have ten observant Jewish men.

But Paul and his team heard about a Sabbath day place of prayer outside the city, by the river. There they found some godly women who were meeting for prayer. Paul shared the gospel with them and Lydia, a well-to-do businesswoman who worshipped the true God, opened her heart to the Lord Jesus. She was saved, and her household believed as well. Her household most likely consisted of servants and maybe children.

Lydia probably had a large house, and she invited Paul and the team to stay at her home. The Lord provided converts and lodging after the very first meeting in Europe! It's wonderful to see how the Lord meet the needs of His servants - then and today.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord can use the enemy's dual strategy to accomplish His purpose.

Acts 16:16-34: *"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. 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."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. 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.*

²⁰ *And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;²¹ and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."²² Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. ²³ And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴ Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

²⁵ *But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 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. 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. ²⁸ But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."²⁹ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 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."*

What an amazing story – and what a turnaround of circumstances! Do you think that this was just coincidence? No way. God was at work to accomplish His purposes.

In our doctrinal point, what does “the enemy’s dual strategy” mean? The Bible teaches that our enemy, Satan, has a dual, or twofold strategy. One tactic is **friendly alliance**, and the other tactic is **frontal assault**. 2 Corinthians 11:14 says that Satan comes as an angel of light. That’s the friendly alliance approach. 1 Peter 5:8 says that Satan comes as a roaring lion. That’s the frontal assault approach. Both tactics are forms of attack and both are seen in Acts 16.

We see the *friendly alliance tactic* in the demon possessed slave girl. She kept crying out after Paul and the team: “*These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.*” This was a true statement. Why would Satan use this approach? It was a cunning and crafty appeal for a friendly alliance. If Paul accepted the demon’s true statement, he would have been linking the gospel with demonic activity. This would damage the gospel message, and it would be a “foot in the door” from which the enemy would discredit and undermine the work of the Lord. Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of the girl. The gospel does not need the testimony of demons! Watch out for the *friendly alliance tactic* of the enemy today. If Satan can get any kinds of strings attached to a ministry or church, he has a foot in the door from which to operate.

Satan’s *frontal assault tactic* is seen in the events that followed. Because the owners of the fortune-telling slave girl had lost their means of making money, they had Paul and Silas dragged before the magistrates of the city. Because they were Jews, Paul and Silas were accused of proselytizing. This was not lawful under Roman law, and Philippi was a Roman colony. As a result, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. This was Satan’s *frontal assault tactic*.

But the Lord can use the enemy’s dual strategy to accomplish His purposes. God worked all these circumstances together so that Satan’s strategy backfired. The prisoners heard and saw the work of the Lord. The Philippian jailer and his household were saved. And Paul and his team got plenty of free advertisement!

God controlled the miracle of the earthquake, right down to the smallest details. All the prison cell doors were opened and all the chains were unlocked - but the prison building was not ruined. No one was killed, and no prisoners escaped. That’s quite an impressive and selective earthquake – a miracle for sure!

When the Philippian jailer asked, “*what must I do to be saved?*” Paul didn’t say to “do penance” or “do good works.” No! “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household*” (v31). Just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved! The jailer’s “household” (his family and servants) also believed, and all of them were baptized as believers (v33). The Philippian jailer, of all people, washed the wounds of his former prisoners, provided them with a meal, and there was great rejoicing.

What a wonderful turnaround of events! The Lord can use the enemy’s dual strategy to accomplish His purposes.

2. The Lord can use the believer's legal status to accomplish His purpose.

Acts 16:35-40: *“And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.”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.”³⁷ But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, un-condemned 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.”³⁸ And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.³⁹ Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.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.”*

Timothy and Luke were probably not arrested because they were Gentiles. Paul and Silas were Jews, but they were Roman citizens. Philippi was a Roman colony, a very desirable position for a city, because it carried certain advantages, including lower taxes. Under Roman law, Roman citizens were not to be beaten with rods and they were to have a fair trial. The magistrates at Philippi had violated the legal rights of Paul and Silas!

When the magistrates learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid for themselves and their status as a Roman colony – and rightly so! Paul insisted on using his legal status to demand a public apology, because a public reversal and apology would help to protect the new believers from the same treatment that he and Silas had received. Word would spread quickly that not only had they been found innocent, but they had also received an apology from the city's leaders!

We never know when and how God will use our own legal status and civil rights to open a door for ministry, or to deliver us from a problem situation. The Lord can use a believer's legal status to accomplish His purpose.

Practical Application

Would we sing in prison?

Verse 25: *“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”* I wonder if Paul and Silas were good singers. Did they have good voices? Could they carry a tune? Could they harmonize? We don't know, and it didn't matter, because they prayed and sang hymns of praise to **God**. And the other prisoners heard them! No doubt Paul and Silas preached the gospel via their prayers and hymns in that dark Philippian prison!

What would we have done? We would have probably prayed for the Lord to help us gain a quick release from jail - but would we have sung hymns to God? This is a great lesson for us, and a great model to follow. In spite of the brutal and unjust treatment they had suffered, Paul and Silas sang in prison. **Would we sing in prison?**