

The Gospel Comes to Philippi

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Well, this morning as we continue our preliminary study of the book of Philippians in a counterintuitive request, I ask you to turn to the book of Acts 16 because it's in Acts 16 that we become acquainted with the church at Philippi and we're taking our time to introduce various different themes in the book of Philippians, trusting that somehow in the providence and the goodness of God it will inform our study in future weeks and months to come as we go through this wonderful epistle.

We had a wonderful time together with over 50 men from our church yesterday morning contemplating things, talking things about the nature of church leadership and whatnot, and the more that we talked, the more that I realized the book of Philippians is just going to be a perfect way for us to move forward as a church. You know, now that we've kind of turned the corner in the early days of our church and we've turned a corner looking forward, Philippians I'm just increasingly convinced is the perfect book in the Bible for us to turn to in the days ahead as we build on the foundation that Christ has laid for us together over the past few years, and so I'm very very excited about this.

Now, in Acts 16 we're going to see some background about the nature and the early start of the church at Philippi, and that's what we're going to cover today, but I just want to give you a little bit of a preliminary sense before we go into it about what it is that I'm hoping that you will see as we go through this passage together all too quickly here this morning. What we find, we what we find in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is this: it is a Gospel that is well designed for the spiritual needs of every kind of sinner that would ever come to him. What we're going to find is that even in the founding and the early success of the Gospel at Philippi, is that sinners of different kinds and of different stripes were coming to Christ and the Gospel was sufficient to save them. You may be someone who has led an outwardly moral life from your earliest days because you were born into a Christian family and it seems like you don't have any major sins to repent of, well, you do and the wonder of the Gospel is that it's designed exactly for a sinner just like you, someone who fears God but has never been born again. The Gospel is the means of your true salvation.

For others that come with us today and some of you know something about the true dark side of sin and your life has been immersed in the grossest forms of darkness, the grossest forms of demonic activity and of the manifestation of a demonically controlled heart with

the outwardness of your sins and your false worship and things like that, and your life has been shown to be lived out in chains of darkness that are evident for anyone to see. What we find is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ can save a sinner just like you as well. Maybe you're a sinner who has just been gripped by fear all of your life, fear of the unknown. Maybe you're later in life and your body is starting to break down and suddenly you're afraid of death and you realize that there is a mortal danger to you and you don't know what lies for you beyond the river. The Gospel, the blessed Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is for sinners just like you as well.

So there's not just one kind of sinner that finds satisfaction in Christ, that finds forgiveness in Christ, the whole spectrum of sinners no matter where your life has been, you can come to Christ and find eternal salvation in him. The Gospel is a proclamation of good news to sinners like every one of you, that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became flesh and lived a perfectly righteous life and he offered up that life at the end as a sacrifice, a blood sacrifice to satisfy the righteous wrath of God against all kinds of sinners if they would simply come to him in humble repentant faith, denying their own righteousness, confessing sin, and calling upon him to be the one and only Savior of their lives, of their souls. The Gospel is for every kind of sinner and that's what we see in the history of the church of Philippi in Acts 16 in representative ways, that's what we see here manifested together as we come together as a local church. Even though there are differences in the way that sin manifested itself in our own individual lives, what we share in common is the fact that every sinner that would ever be saved finds his salvation in the one true Gospel, in the one true Savior who is Jesus Christ. So no one should think that they have sinned too far and that they have sinned themselves out of the grace of God. That's not true, my friend. As long as you are drawing breath and as long as your ears are hearing the words of the Gospel, even if you have rejected Christ repeatedly, repeatedly, I say, and you have hardened your heart repeatedly against him, the Gospel comes to you fresh today and Christ promises mercy to the one who will come to him and that is our encouragement, that is our strength, that is what we are looking to see as we enter into this passage here this morning.

Now last time, I tried to introduce some context to the book of Philippians and we, I say we, I kind of went in a little bit different direction and expanded some things that needed to be said. That's alright. We're trying to establish some context and we said that there was a context of promise about the Gospel that plays out as we consider the book to Philippians, the fact that the Gospel was planned by God before the foundation of the world and that he is working out an eternal plan in time to accomplish his objectives that will result in praise and glory and honor to Christ throughout all of eternity yet to come, and the Gospel is embedded, is central to that plan. In time, we saw that 4,000 years ago, God promised to Abraham that he would raise up a seed from Abraham's loins who would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Later on, 1,000 years later, out of the loins of Abraham came Israel's great King David and God made promises to David that his son would be the one who would be the ultimate fulfillment of these promises. You go forward another 1,000 years and you read in the New Testament Gospels, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega. Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David, the fulfillment of everything that God had promised in times old to the

patriarchs now has been brought forth in the person of God Incarnate, the glorious, the one, the only, the Lord Jesus Christ."

So Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of these promises that were made thousands of years ago. Christ fulfilled what was necessary for his people to be saved in his righteous life and in his atoning death. He was raised from the dead, ascended on high, but before he went out, he sent his apostles, he commissioned his apostles to take the announcement of that good news of his death, burial and resurrection as the satisfaction necessary to reconcile sinners to God, he commissioned his disciples to take that out into all of the world, to go to all the nations. He met with another man as "one untimely born," Scripture says, the Apostle Paul and uniquely appointed Paul to go and bear testimony to the Gentiles, people like you and me. No Jewish blood in us. Not on the receiving end of those promises made to the physical descendants of Abraham. But Christ in his great mercy and again in the context of this great promise of God to bring blessing to all the families of the earth, not just the Jews, Christ, the plan was to include people beyond the Jews and I don't know about you but not having a drop of Jewish blood in me, I'm really glad that the plan included Gentiles too. And in the context of promise, Paul goes out and preaches the Gospel in fulfillment of the unique assignment given to him by the Lord Jesus and we looked at that a couple of weeks ago.

Now that's the context of promise. We briefly said that we also want to keep in mind the context of Paul. Paul was the founding apostle of the church at Philippi but that was just one aspect of a broader ministry that he had that's recorded in Acts 12-28 and then expanded upon in the 13 letters of Paul from Romans to Philemon in your New Testament. We saw that Paul preached Christ on three different missionary journeys that are recorded for us in the book of Acts. He established churches in many different cities of the known world on those journeys that are recorded for us in different chapters in the book of Acts, and later on as time went on and as he moved on to other things, in the plan of God and in Paul's personal, genuine, human concern for those converts, he would write to them as he learned about their condition, to help them pastorally, to clarify and defend them theologically against error, against false teachers, and also sometimes to rebuke and to correct them that they might grow in the image of Christ. That's the context of promise and the context of Paul, very broadly speaking, in which we find the book of Philippians.

As we said last time, Paul founded the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey, all in the context of his apostolic ministry and, beloved, there's a sense in which, one of the reasons why I go into such context on things like this is because I believe that it has a sanctifying impact on our hearts to do so, to realize something of the context, to realize that our faith is built on a historical foundation of things that actually happened in time and space, and to realize that we have inherited here 4,000 years after Abraham, 2,000 years after Christ and Paul, roughly speaking, that when we talk about the Gospel and as we enjoy Christ and as we enjoy the fellowship of saints together, that we are in a realm that is exceedingly precious, a realm that is exceedingly transcendent, that we are in a realm that far transcends the significance of our own individual lives. God has blessed us to include us in this great eternal plan but we're a part of a bigger picture. It's not about you at the center. It's not about me at the center. This is about Christ and his

glory, about Christ and what he's done for his people, and we are on the receiving end. We have briefly received a baton of truth that has been handed to us, entrusted to us, to carry in our own little realm for whatever it is, for whatever short period of time, and to pass it on to someone else. We have received a great heritage for by the grace of God we defend it in our realm for a period of time and then we pass it on, but we realize, beloved, beloved, we realize that we are greatly privileged to share in these magnificent things of such great eternal worth and eternal value.

So we come, we come with a sense of reverence, we come with a sense of humility as we come and see what God has done and with a grateful sense of response, we contemplate what then does this mean for me? How then am I to respond and to obey in response to these things that have been given? For some of you, it's the obedience of initial faith, of coming to Christ and repenting of your sin and repenting of your godlessness and your indifference, your cold hearts, and say, "Oh, this Christ is so magnificent! I must come to him. I'm drawn to him." And for the rest of us to just realize that as we gather together week after week as a local body seeking to be faithful to our Lord and Savior, you know, to realize that we're part of something that's bigger than any one of us; that it's not simply about what we want out of anything in life or out of a church or out of the Gospel, that we're part of something that gives us opportunity and responsibility to share in it with others, to manifest a sense of responsibility and love toward others and not just about ourselves; not simply to please ourselves with our lives, not just to please ourselves in our approach to involvement in a local church, but to realize that this is a part of a bigger picture. The eternal plan of God is at work. We rejoice to be a part of that. We're privileged. This is grace upon grace upon grace that we would have something like this to share in but it lifts us out of our natural inclination toward self-centeredness and gives us a sense to look beyond ourselves to what Christ would have to his glory and to that which would best serve his people. That's why we come together. There's a whole context to it all. So we never forget that, we never want to forget that.

Now what we do having looked at it from a great satellite view, let's come down to maybe a 30,000 foot view of the church at Philippi over the next 45 minutes or so. We looked at the context of promise, the context of Paul, and now we want to look at the context of Philippi. The context of Philippi, and for that we need to turn to Acts 16 as I have already asked you to do. Beloved, it is here that we first meet some of the brothers and sisters in Christ that one day will be with us, we will join them in heaven. We read about the founding of the church at a city called Philippi.

Now, I don't want to get too bogged down in geographic details here but I do want to just give you a little bit of a sense of something that I think can give you a little bit of a picture on a map for those of you that have not traveled in Europe. If you picture the Mediterranean Sea and kind of that oblong mass body of water sitting below Italy and above Africa, if you picture the Mediterranean Sea, the city of Philippi was north of roughly the center of it and was north of the center of the Mediterranean Sea, north of the nation of the area that is Greece today. In today's terms, it was situated between modern Turkey to the east and the boot of Italy to the west. So if you picture Italy and the Mediterranean Sea, Africa below that and Turkey there, Philippi was in the center up

above that body of water about 800 miles east of the city of Rome. That gives you just a little bit of geographic context and that's where the city was that Paul went to in Acts 16 as he traveled through different regions of the known world carrying the Gospel to these cities in obedience to the apostolic commission that was given to him directly by Christ.

So Paul was taking the Gospel to real people in real cities in the real course of history and what we find in Acts 16 is how that happened, what we find is that in obedience to a vision, he left Asia Minor, which is the area of modern day Turkey, he left Asia Minor to sail for Europe and we'll pick up the story in Acts 16:9 where it says,

9 A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 So 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.

So here we find the historical account of how Paul came to be in Philippi. He was an apostle of Jesus Christ, God spoke to him by a vision and directed his steps to leave where he was at to go to this city because God had prepared people to receive the Gospel at that time and at that place. He had, you could say, a very specific divine appointment to fulfill and just keeping the context woven together here, beloved, what I want you to see is that this was no incidental sudden change of plans that was taking place here. This was appointed by God as we'll see in just a couple of moments stated plainly in the text. There was a time and a place and a people that were appointed by God and by the power of the Holy Spirit he moved his apostolic representative, he moved Paul to be in a position to preach to these people that God had appointed before time began to hear the Gospel.

Now this is sacred stuff. We're seeing an outworking of the plan of God to bring blessing to nations, to bring blessing to families of the earth, and what I never want you to lose sight of as we're going through this passage here this morning, is to realize that God had determined before time began to display this grace to these dear people at Philippi, these people who were lost, these people who were fearful, these people who did not know the true God, who had not been born again. God is determining to bless them at the hands of the Apostle Paul and while we are not apostles, and we never will be apostles, beloved, we should have something of a sense that part of our Christian existence is that from time to time and place to place, God is orchestrating events so that we as Christians might be the voice of his Gospel to the people that he would providentially bring into our lives, maybe sometimes family, maybe sometimes coworkers, maybe sometimes customers, I don't know, but this is part of us developing in our mindset a sense that we look beyond ourselves, we look outside our individual lives for the benefit that the Gospel brings to me, brings to you personally and how it helps us personally to look beyond that to say there are lost people in darkness that God has appointed one day to come to him, and

sometimes God gives you and me the privilege of being the human tongue that declares that to them, the human hand that hands material to them that they can hear and read. All of this understanding informs the way that we approach these things, that God is working out a plan. We're not random stars in a meaningless universe here, God saves us to use us. He called Paul to use Paul and he's using him here in Philippi.

Now what did Paul find when he got there? Well, evidently Philippi was a city that did not have many Jews in it. Paul, remember, was specifically called to the Gentiles so in one sense that's what we would expect, what we know, what the historians and the scholars tell us is that it took 10 men, 10 biological males, to form a synagogue, 10 Jewish men to form a synagogue, but when Paul arrives in Philippi, he doesn't go to a synagogue. Apparently there wasn't a synagogue there. There weren't enough Jews to have a synagogue there so instead he goes and he finds a group of devout people that are outside the city who were praying.

Look at verse 13 with me. It says,

13 And on the Sabbath day [when you'd normally be looking for a synagogue, there's no synagogue] 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.

Maybe there weren't even any men there at all. He's speaking to women, carrying the Gospel to whatever opportunity is given to him, and what did he find there as he spoke to these women? He found a receptive audience. He found those who would hear and receive what it was that he had to say.

Look at verse 14. It says,

14 A 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."

So we meet this woman named Lydia who was apparently a businesswoman of some means. The purple fabric of which it speaks was expensive material, expensive dyes that colored the cloth, and it's possible that she had come to Philippi in order to extend her business. But whatever her business associations and contacts and success may have been, I want you to see a couple of things about Lydia. First of all, it calls her a worshiper of God but yet she was someone who had not yet savingly believed. She needed to hear the Gospel. She receives, she listens to Paul, and what happens here to Lydia is illustrative of what happens to everyone who comes to true faith in Christ. It's not that Lydia was already worshiping the true God, she was a worshiper of God but in darkness still, and it wasn't so much that she made her own independent choice to believe in this Christ of which Paul was speaking to her about. Look at it there with me in verse 14,

though she was a worshiper of God, she was in need of a work of God upon her heart and it says in verse 14 that "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

So great is God's grace and mercy to those that come under the sound of the Gospel and those that he intends to save, so great is it, beloved, so great if you're in Christ, so great was his grace upon you that he didn't leave you to the resources and the power of your own dark and dead heart. If he had done that, none of us would be here today, none of us would be saved because the natural heart is hostile to the things of God it says in Romans 8. We're dead in trespasses and sins and therefore we don't have the power, the ability or the desire to respond to the things of the Gospel on our own. What God does in salvation is he brings the sound of the Gospel to bear on a lost heart and in the process of that message going into the ears, he opens the heart and gives it the ability to respond and opens the mind and by a divine work of power, effectively calls one to himself and gives them the ability to respond that they did not have beforehand. And Lydia and her family by that power and by that act of God, it says she and her household had been baptized, others around her in her family believed as well. She and her family became the first Christians in Europe, the first Christians in Philippi.

What a glorious position for them to be in. Lydia here, Lydia and her family, first generation Christians in a first generation city coming under the sound of the Gospel. The glory, the wonder, the display of the grace of God out of thousands of people living there at the time, directed Paul right to her. God not only orchestrated the external circumstances but did a work inside her heart to ensure that she would believe and come to Christ. She and her household believed and the earliest converts in Europe were there and the new church began to meet in her home.

What do we say about this for us today? Well, I'll tell you what I think, I think this has an immense implication for those of you that have grown up in Christian homes and have been, you know, maybe you've just kind of naturally gone along with what your parents have taught you, what your family traditions have been and you've just been along for the ride, so to speak, and you're not actively hostile to God, you're inclined and in a sense you're a worshiper of God, but you haven't been born again. You don't have new life in your heart. What I want you to see is that the Gospel is for you and you need the Gospel. Even someone like you who has never consciously disbelieved, you still need to be born again. You still need to come to Christ. You still have to respond by faith in him. It's not enough simply to be a theist, to be a believer in God, you need to come to Christ for your salvation. And the encouragement for those of you that have grown up in Christian homes and this is all that you've known, is to see that the Gospel's for you as well; that the Gospel comes to you and God receives dead sinners like you in Christ.

So I invite sinners like that, sinners like you to come to Christ where you've been content to just kind of live on the outskirts without truly coming to Christ and giving your life to him in a conscious, deliberate, complete and unconditional way. Come to Christ and be saved. The Gospel's for a worshiper of God like you who needs to be born again. God saves those who fear God and yet do not have a full understanding of the Gospel. It's

wonderful news. Wonderful news, perhaps the news that needs to be heard most by the broadest biggest number of people in this room today.

Secondly, what else do we see here? Well, we see as we go on that Paul's ministry in Philippi soon brought him into conflict with demons and with hostile city leaders. Go on in verse 16 there with me.

16 It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 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 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.

Now let me say a couple of things just briefly superficially about this passage. You know, I remember as an early Christian reading that and wondering, "Why would Paul do that? Why would you silence someone who was attesting to the truth of your ministry? That seems a little bit counterintuitive. Why wouldn't you welcome that?" Well, look, the Gospel of Christ and the Lord Jesus don't need demons commending it to people. The wicked source of the attestation could only serve to divide and confuse and continue people in greater darkness and so Paul silences a demon that is testifying to him, simply trying to distract and confuse the matter. We never ever need help from the demonic realm. We don't need that kind of help. We don't need the help of unseen spirits because Scripture warns us to take care of the fact that there is an invisible side to life, there is an invisible realm inhabited by demons that are actively seeking to undermine the Gospel, to confuse us, to draw us away from Christ, to keep eyes blinded and to lead them safely into hell, so to speak, safely from the demons' standpoint.

So Paul comes into open conflict with demons in the course of his ministry and this dear little girl, whatever her age was, was being used by men and manipulated and who were using her to make money because this evil spirit that was in her could do things, could predict things, could tell the future, and when you've got an asset like that, you can make a lot of money off of it. But it's demonic. But it's from the realm of Satan. It has nothing to do with and there's no share of things like that with us in the Gospel and so Paul silences the demon and takes control of the situation and this girl evidently saved by the Gospel as she is delivered from a satanic demonic realm.

Now that didn't set too well. People who make money off demonic things are never going to respond well when they're challenged and that's what happened here in verse 19. Look at it with me. In verse 19,

19 ... 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."

So these men who had no interest in spiritual things whatsoever were nevertheless the source or the means by which satanic opposition to Paul's ministry was manifested. So in conflict with Paul, they misrepresent things to the city authorities, not concerned over truth, simply concerned over their wallet or whatever other kind of moneybag they were carrying back then, and they misrepresent Paul, they lie about him and they hide their own true motives in order to silence them, in order to oppose them, in order to stop this advance of the Gospel if it were possible using human authority as a means to manipulate and to hinder the Gospel.

Well, that's good for us to know, isn't it? It's good to know that sometimes as Christians, sometimes as those who seek to be faithful to the Gospel of Christ, it's good to see in the example of the Apostle Paul that there are times where the true spokesmen of God will be misrepresented, maligned and accused of things falsely in an effort to silence them, to hinder the Gospel. We see in the church of Philippi that fact that false things will be spoken against the truth and yet we see the prevailing power of God to bring his Gospel to pass nevertheless.

Let's pause for a moment and just think about this slave-girl that Paul delivered, to recognize that this somehow in a way that isn't recorded for us in the text, somehow this dear young woman, this girl, was brought under the influence and the power of a demonic realm and she was now subject to powers that were beyond her control just as sometimes maybe some of you have come under the power of sins that you now know are beyond your control. You dabbled in something and what you thought you were going to enjoy now owns you and you're in darkness and you can't deliver yourself from it. It's stronger than you are and it owns you. The Bible says whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. You're under a power greater than you. Well, what a blessing to see in the history of the church of Philippi that the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ can deliver you even from a supernatural realm that you don't have strength over; that Christ Jesus, the Lord, comes to you with sovereign power not only over the universe but sovereign power over sin, sovereign power over Satan, sovereign power to deliver even a one like you or a one like you, to deliver you from a power that's too great for you but is not too great for Christ. He has the power to break the chains of sin and Satan over your soul. He has the power to save and so we proclaim Christ and we offer to you Christ today and to your friends today that you can take this message to, with the full assurance that Christ Jesus has the power to save everyone who believes in him and to deliver them from darkness and from the power of sin.

Let me remind you of something that this dear apostle said in Romans 1. Go back to Romans 1. You see, while it is a wonderful reality that Paul brought the Gospel and a woman named Lydia was saved and this slave-girl was saved, it's a wonderful thing to realize, what I want you to see is that the Gospel is not – oh – the Gospel is not an effeminate message that is only designed to appeal to the sentiments and the emotions of

weak people. The true Gospel of Jesus Christ is a Gospel of power to deliver men and women alike from sin, to deliver them from Satan, to deliver them from judgment. We must see this.

Romans 1:16, Paul speaks about the Gospel in terms of its great power. Romans 1:16, he says, let's start in verse 15, he says, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For," why am I not ashamed? Why am I so eager, in other words, why am I so eager? Because, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, "I'm eager to preach it because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." It can save a worshiper of God who needs to be born again. It has the power to deliver from satanic domination from slavery to sin. It has the power to deliver everybody who believes from whatever the greater power is that is enslaving them and binding them and controlling their lives.

You see, I think that in our day and age it's sometimes hard to make that point and have it heard clearly because it is the nature of our society, and probably just the nature of man throughout the courses of all history because there's nothing new under the sun, but you see, our problem in part with the Gospel and as a church and as Christians in this age in which we live, is that we're taking the Gospel to people who love their sin, who don't view it as a problem. They're in chains of lusts that they cannot get out from and in the name of freedom they're in slavery, freedom as they define it, and they pick up the heavy chains that are around their ankles, around their wrists, and around their neck that they can't leave, and they kiss those chains as though they were something good when actually it is the very thing that binds them, that enslaves them, that they run about blindly from day to day bouncing off of one disaster to another in search of the next great thrill in their lives.

What I want you to see from the word of God is that ultimately what those people need is not a 12 step program, ultimately what they need is not some kind of curative dose to be administered to counteract their overdose, ultimately what they need is the power of Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Gospel because the Gospel is the power of God to deliver from sin, to deliver from Satan to everyone who believes. The word of God, the Gospel of Christ has the power to bring down strongholds, has the power to demolish walls, has the power, to drop the metaphors, has the power to pierce the human heart by the power as it is applied by the Holy Spirit and to deliver men from those things that bind them. Sinners need to be delivered from sin, not simply to be taught how to manage the consequences of sin. They need to be delivered from its power, not simply adjust so it doesn't literally physically kill them and the Gospel is that power.

In Acts 16, you can turn back there, you see that it had the power to deliver this young girl from demonic possession, but the unsaved world around her was stirred up against the messengers who brought her deliverance and in verse 22 we continue to read and we see the consequences that faithfulness brought to Paul. In verse 22,

22 The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them [referring to Paul and Silas] and proceeded to order

them to be beaten with rods. 23 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; 24 and he [meaning the jailer], having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Now we were talking about chains, Paul and Silas are now actually in chains. They're actually in physical chains in the innermost chamber of the dungeon that they sought to use to silence these words of the Gospel that they were speaking. They were stripped, beaten and thrown into jail but, beloved, what I want you to see is, and to think through your life and to try to sort out how this applies in your own thinking about your own circumstances, a man who is in Jesus Christ is never really in chains. He is the man most free. Christ here ministers to Paul and Silas in prison, as we'll see in a moment, but what you find is that the men who threw them there were animated by hatred and animosity and greed and ignorance. They're the ones who were truly in the chains here. Paul and Silas, as the book by F. F. Bruce says, Paul was an apostle whose heart was set free. He was the apostle of the heart set free. The heart was free even if the body was in chains and you see this in verse 25.

25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

They weren't moaning over their adverse circumstances, they weren't complaining about the injustice that had just been administered to them as Roman citizens. They're rejoicing. They're praying. They're singing hymns of praise to God. Beloved, what I want you to see is that for those of us who have been set free by Christ, that we do belong to him, you have been delivered from sin, you have been delivered from judgment, it is true of you that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, beloved, what I want you to see is that that needs to start to flavor your response to every circumstance in life. No matter what the difficulty is, no matter what the interpersonal conflict may be, for us to understand and to realize that for God to include us in the context of this great eternal plan, to belong to Christ, to know him, to be on the receiving end of his love should form in us at the core and the foundation of our being a response of joy, a response of gratitude that allows us to sing in the midst of conflict and to be peacemakers where others of lesser cloth would be those who perpetuate conflict.

We just need to take the word of God to heart here. If you are in Christ, you have every reason you need to rejoice today. In fact, Scripture commands it, 1 Thessalonians 5, you know, rejoicing always, in everything give thanks. Later on in Philippians 4, Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I'll say, rejoice." What we need to see here today as we sit here comfortably in the 21st century perhaps having come in with a bit of a grumbling attitude about things, about life that weren't quite to our liking or people that weren't quite to our liking, is to realize that here is Paul and Silas unjustly beaten, no doubt their physical bodies throbbing in pain, and their hearts are throbbing with joy, singing praise to God to the point that others are forced to listen.

Beloved, let's examine our hearts on that score as well, shall we? I've got to be a pastor here, right? That's what I do. We need to not accept from ourselves the grumbling spirit that we're so easily drawn into and to accept that or the anxious spirit, and to accept that as our fundamental pattern of responding to life. That's not right. That is sub-Christian living. What we need to see no matter the grief, no matter the adversity, what we need to see is that the Gospel lifts us above it and that we love Christ and we love what he has done for us and we love the future that lies ahead of us enough to let Christ and his death and his resurrection and his ascension, his eternal plan for us to be that which informs and drives our response to life rather than the petty irritations of the circumstances or the people around us. I realize I'm getting into everybody's kitchen here, but the text calls us to this. Paul and Silas suffering more than we do now, for higher reasons than we do now, and there they are praying and singing hymns of praise. Beloved, this is what Christianity looks like lived out and to the extent that you and I, I'm including myself here, to the extent that we fall short of that because of resentment that we've allowed to kind of grow like moss around the root of our tree, we need to clean it out. We need to confess it as sin and we need to get back to the joy that God calls us to as a righteous faithful response to the glory of the Gospel and the power and the person that saved us, don't we?

Now, as we go on we find that God intervened miraculously for Paul and Silas. Verse 26,

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. 27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

He had to keep those prisoners in his custody under penalty of capital punishment if they got away so he's ready to kill himself because that's what's going to happen. He sees everything open and he says, "It's over for me."

Then in verse 28, Paul, blessed Paul, cried out with a loud voice. Now beloved, for a moment, for a moment let's put aside all of our own stuff and put ourselves in the shoes of this jailer now, this jailer who has been awakened by a violent earthquake. If you've never had that happen to you, it's happened to me, it is frightening in and of itself to have the walls shaking and the floor heaving underneath you and everything that you thought was stable is now unstable and seems like it's going to swallow you up. He had an immediate fear just by the physical circumstances of it, he has an immediate fear of death as shown by the fact he's ready to plunge the sword into his own bowels to hasten the inevitable and all he knows is he thinks, he's been told that these prisoners, Paul and Silas, were insurrectionists, unlawful, godless men who deserved to be there. His whole world is literally being shaken inside and out by what's happening around him and in verse 28, this supposedly wretched rebel calls out to him in grace, in kindness, in concern for his well-being, verse 28,

28 ... Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" 29 And [the jailer] 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?"

Everything about life was overwhelming to him. In a tortured fear of soul, in understandable terror, he goes to Paul and pleads, "What must I do to be saved? You men can't be what I was told you are. You must have something that is for the good of my soul and I ask you to give it to me." And they said, verse 31,

31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Oh, what precious words. What precious words. In all of this torment and torrent of fear, he is met with words of kind simplicity of grace, "Believe in Christ and you'll be saved, you'll be safe, you'll be delivered from everything that afflicts your inner man. Believe in Christ and you will be delivered from it now. It's not just for you, it's for your household as well."

Now notice what happens in verse 32, they go on and explain what that statement meant. We love Acts 16:31 as a Gospel statement, a nice little summary, but for this man who had no prior exposure to Christ, he needed to know something of the substance of what that meant. Paul said, "In general, let me tell you the general statement, you believe in Christ and you'll be saved. There is hope for you even in your fear. Now let me tell you what that means," and he goes on and he explains and the content of what he said would be informed by a full reading of the entire book of Acts because what Paul said elsewhere in Acts would be consistent with what he told this jailer here. And this jailer responds in faith, verse 33,

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.

Just notice that it says his whole household believed. This was baptism based on belief, not simply on human birth. We'll leave it there for another time.

Christ comes in mercy to those who are captivated by fear. Maybe you're enslaved not to some kind of sin or demon per se, but you're just conscious your life is a mess because you're just controlled by fear, fear of the future, fear of what's going to happen, fear of illness, fear of what's going to happen with your family, fear for your unsaved loved ones. Fear, fear, fear, fear dominating everything about your perspective on life, right? I don't speak without reason to some of you, do I? What you need to see is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer to your fears as well. Fear of death, fear of circumstances, fear of others, all brought under the Lordship of Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. The same God that sovereignly brought salvation to you in the proclamation of the Gospel is far more than willing and able to take care of those circumstantial personal dimension of things that grip your heart with fear.

Beloved, you don't need a change in circumstances, you just need to understand that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. He'll save you to the uttermost. Sound it out to your heart, sound it out and preach it to yourself that Jesus saves. Jesus saves. Jesus saves. And if you belong to him, it is a complete and comprehensive salvation that covers everything that concerns you. Maybe you don't get deliverance right now in the immediate circumstance or on the timing that you would prefer, but beloved, if Christ saved your soul, if Christ loved you enough to give himself up at Calvary, don't you think that he loves you enough to take care of everything else that concerns your heart? Jesus saves.

What we find, then, you read the rest of Acts and you'll see how the city leaders were now afraid of Paul and asked him to leave because he was now a threat to them. I just ask you, beloved, have you called on Christ truly for salvation? Have you? These things are of too great a consequence to just take for granted and make assumptions and presumptions and with a wave of the hand say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, could you shut up so that I could go home? I've got other things to do here." Well, do you know what? I don't care if you do have other things to do. This is the most important matter that any of us can deal with. It's the matter of your eternal destiny. It's the matter of your sin and guilt before God. Has that been removed from your soul? Have you come to Christ and cried out like the jailer, "Save me! What must I do to be saved?" And I can tell you on the authority of God's word that there's nothing for your hands to do, it's a matter of your heart turning to Christ and receiving and believing in him and I don't care what else you've got to do today, I don't care what's happening tomorrow, this is about what happens in eternity tomorrow and you'd be a fool to dismiss it. You'd be a fool to let your preoccupation with passing, temporary, earthly matters cloud out the Gospel from its call on your soul. Don't do that.

And my Christian sisters and brothers, Christ is our all. He is reason enough for us to rejoice no matter what else comes, even if the physical pain doesn't go away, even if the conflict isn't immediately solved. Christ loves us. Christ has saved us. Christ will carry us to glory. Of course, we give thanks in everything. Of course, we rejoice in him.

Let's pray together.

I just appeal to you one more time, my friend, Christ saves men and women from a variety of different backgrounds but you must seek him and receive him for yourself. You must flee to him, apply yourself to him by faith for salvation. And for those of us who are in Christ, we need to apply ourselves and remember the wonderful way that he has saved us that we might grow spiritually and not be overcome with the earthly anxieties and frustrations that mark those men and women of the world.

Father, help us to grow in Christ and have mercy on those who are yet dead in sin who have heard these words today. Father, may they see in the example of Lydia who believed and was saved, in this slave-girl who was delivered from her demonic possession by the power of the Gospel, in this dear jailer who was so afraid and found salvation in Christ.

Father, apply it to each and every one of us according to the need of our individual hearts in the power, in the strength, in the name of Your Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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