

## Our Proclamation

*Upside Down*

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts 16. When we sing and speak of amazing grace, no better chapter to turn into to what we know as Acts 16. For those of you that are guests or visitors with us, let me invite you to finish the journey with us. You say, "Finish the journey?" We have been walking this season through what we know as the book of Acts and we're almost to the conclusion. Now I know what you may be thinking, the book of Acts has 28 chapters, how can we almost be done when we're just halfway there? Where more than just the chronology of the early church, more than just a biography of those key figures in those early days, we're centering all of our studies around chapter 17, particularly verse 6, where it says that these early believers who were greatly outnumbered, greatly out-resourced, and literally attacked by the powers that be, that these are the ones who've turned the world upside down.

How is it that this took place? We studied the event known as Pentecost. We looked at the early martyrs. We saw Saul of Tarsus become the great evangelist of the early church, but today as we are knocking on the door of chapter 17, we would be remiss if we did not study three very critical characters in chapter 16, for here in chapter 16 we discover what is the message, what is the proclamation that changes a person's life, what is the proclamation that changes a community's life, what is the proclamation that can turn the world upside down? Beginning in verse 13, we're going to be introduced to three very well-known characters: a lady by the name of Lydia, a young damsel or lady who has a spirit of divination, and that famous Philippian jailer. This is a unique place in the Bible for this is rare that we see just kind of these stories that are back to back to back, very reminiscent of the gospel of Luke 15. If you remember that famous chapter, Jesus goes up on the hillside and the Bible says that he says this parable. Interesting that it uses the singular there because there are stories of a sheep that has gone wayward, coins that cannot be found, and that famous prodigal son who needs to repent and come back home. Much like Luke 15, those are three very independent stories that have one overarching theme. In just a moment, we're going to read the story of three very individual characters who, as we come to the close, all have the exact same story.

Beginning in verse 13 of Acts 16, it says,

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. 16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: 17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. 18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. 19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, 20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. 22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. 23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. 25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

We have three very unique personas here in Acts 16. We're only given pieces of their individual stories but there's one overarching theme and if you will forgive me for putting the proverbial cart before the horse, when we get to verse 31, we discover that the answer, the solution, the cure, the balm to all of our concerns and issues is no other than Jesus Christ himself.

But we begin with the "who." Who are these characters, not just their respective names and biographies but their stories represent who we as humanity often fall into the categories of. Let's begin with Lydia. She's a woman who's very concerned about matters of faith. She's very concerned about her relationship with the Lord. In fact, if you go back to verse 13, it says that her story picks up on the sabbath day where her and some ladies went down to the river and they prayed. Now you may be questioning how do we know that means they were faith-seeking, sincere folks about their relationship with the Lord? Well, oftentimes the Apostle Paul when he would go into a new area, he would begin in the sabbath day and he would begin in the synagogue teaching and preaching to those that had a Jewish background, but in those days, you could not establish a formal synagogue unless you had 10 men willing to establish it. Well, there's no men mentioned, much less 10 of them, so what did Lydia do? She said, "I may not have a formal place to worship, I may not have a place that has been entitled to worship, but I'm going to seek God." In fact, if you've read the first part of chapter 16, you discover what we know as the Macedonian call. There's a man here in Macedonia, the general region that they're in, and he cries out to God saying, "God, I want to know you. I need to know you." And there the Apostle Paul gets a vision from the Lord to go unto him. Very much like in chapter 10 when Cornelius prayed and gave alms, the Lord sent Peter unto him, and what do we discover about those of us who are concerned about our relationship with God? What do we find about those of us who are seeking God? If we seek him, he always comes and meets us where we are. Here it was the Apostle Paul that he sent unto her. You know, the Bible says that those that we seek him, we shall find him. There was a theologian some couple of hundred years after this text was given to us who made this grand statement that inside each and every one of us is a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill. You have a woman that is concerned about her relationship with the Lord and the Lord meets her where she is.

Then we have this unique story beginning in verse 16. There is this young lady who is, according to your Bible, demon-possessed, possessed by a spirit of divination who we discover is very confused. Now you say, "Well, I'm confused too because why is it that would Paul dismiss this 'demon' when it was saying what it was saying?" In fact, if you'll turn to verse 17, there's this unique statement that is made. It says, "These men," this is the words of the young girl, "are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Now can we just confess at first glance or first hearing, that doesn't sound too bad, does it? I mean, after all, the most high God, way of salvation, that should be a good thing. Why does the Apostle Paul say, "Get out of her"? You see, the confusion was in the statement that she made. "The most high God" is a title that is never reserved for the one true God. You'll never see that expression embraced by the creator and the sustainer of our entire existence. In fact, back in Jesus' day, the term "most high God" was a general reference to whomever you held in that position. You know, when we get to chapter 17, the Apostle Paul, he's going to be meeting with some philosophers of his day who recognize a plurality of deities and gods, so much so that they have an altar set up to the unknown god just in case they missed one.

What's the confusion here? The confusion is that she sounded appropriate but was completely in error. Allow me to illustrate. Genesis 3:1. The garden of Eden, Adam and Eve minding their own business. The serpent shows up and he makes this grand statement. He says, "Are you not able to eat of every tree of the garden except for the one of the knowledge of good and evil?" And then we know the dialog that follows that. Do you know the biggest problem with that "statement" is that it was 90% true. You see, back in chapter 2, the Lord told Adam and Eve, "You may eat of every tree of the garden freely except for the one of the knowledge of good and evil." You know, one of the things that I've learned in life is the best lies are 90% true, and when she makes this statement, "Oh, the most high God," she is not claiming the exclusivity of Jesus Christ but she's claiming he's really no different than other ones. It's very much and very similar like today. We live in a world of competing faiths. We live in a world, if you allow me to use the phrase, of cults who propagate words you're familiar with but definitions that are very different than what the Bible says, and we live in a world today where there's a lot of confused people. There are a lot of people who claim they know the way. There's a lot of people who claim they have the answers but the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14 that God is not the author of confusion.

So we've got a woman who's concerned about things, we've got a woman who's very confused, and then there's this final character, this Philippian jailer. In fact, if you go down to verse 27, we discover that he's a condemned soul. What does it say? "He drew out his sword that he would have killed himself." Now back in the book of Acts 12, we discover that these men who had these high profile inmates, that if they were to somehow lessen their guard so that they were to escape or a conspiracy was formed for their removal from the jailhouse, that they would lose their life also. Lydia was concerned about a relationship with the Lord, this young girl, she is confused as she can be, but this man, he's condemned. He sees that there is no hope, he sees there is no purpose, and in our context today, just make it go numb or end it all. You know, without being too broad stroked, I think we've summarized every human on the planet today. Everybody is either concerned looking for the answers, confused about the answers they've got, or they're so tired of searching, they're so tired of looking they're a condemned soul who just wants to numb the pain and end it all.

You see, that's their respective stories but I want us to go back and look at what picture the Lord gives us. We go back to Lydia in verse 14 and I want you to notice what it says. It says, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened up." You see, now we're going to go from individual stories to the overarching story that's being told here in chapter 16. It doesn't matter what the issue is, it doesn't matter what the baggage is, it doesn't matter what the hurt is, it doesn't matter what the confusion is, our issue is a heart problem that must be resolved. You see, we look around and we see behavior that is all over the place but you understand that that behavior is a result of a decision that's been made. That decision is because of the convictions that people hold and those convictions naturally outflow from the belief that they do or they do not possess. I love what Acts 16:14 says: every problem that sends us sideways contrary to the Lord and contrary with each other is a heart problem. Now we may see it manifested in the flesh, we may hear it

come out with words or see it in actions, but at the end of the day the problem is a heart problem.

What about the confusion? What about the young girl who can't see which way is up and which way is down, which way is left, which way is right? I think it's interesting that in verse 18, the Apostle Paul comes to her and says, "he that is in you must be removed." Now this is important because we understand humanity has a heart problem but allow me to share with you what's being told or communicated here. This was a young lady who was possessed by and being operated by the wrong spirit. Did you know that's you and I as well? Ephesians 2, it begins by saying that each and every one of us before we were saved, before we called on Jesus to save us, we have the spirit of disobedience. It means that we're unable to do that which is right. We speak error. We don't speak truth. But you know, the Bible says in Colossians 1 that when we get saved – listen to this – we've been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Why do you think we just sang that classic song, "Amazing grace. I once was blind but now I can see"? In other words, she could not see what was happening around her, she could not comprehend for the confusion until the spirit of disobedience was removed from her. You know what 1 Corinthians 6 says? That when you call upon Jesus, that spirit of disobedience is replaced by the Holy Spirit of God that is able to guide us and to direct us and make it to where we're not confused anymore, to make us know whose we are, whom we are, and where we are to operate.

Then finally, there's this jailer condemned with a sword that's been pulled. I want you to follow these stories here. It's a heart issue where the spirit that is in error must be replaced. But you notice here in verse 28, it begins with my favorite word in the Bible. If you're a guest or visitor with me, just hang on there. I love this word, "But." Can you imagine if the story ended in verse 27? Imagine if it ended with a sword being pulled, a life that has ended. What does Paul do? He cried with a loud voice, "We are all here." Now can we kind of read between the lines here? What was taking place? Paul and Silas had been singing, they had been preaching, they had been proclaiming truth. He figured they'd just taken off. He figured, "Well, they just left me to my own death. Surely they would rather be free than to deal with me." What do we discover? That the Bible is true when it says how can they be saved unless they hear the gospel? How can they hear the gospel unless there is a preacher to tell them? You see, the picture of the "what" here is that all of us have a heart condition that must go from that which is in error to that which is in truth that can only be solved by the preaching of the word of God.

Now let's deal with the "when." When did this take place? Now this is really pretty simplistic here. It doesn't matter whether we're down by the river with Lydia, whether we're at the meeting house with this young lady, or whether we're in jail with the Philippian jailer, there is a constant thread of when their life was altered forever, when they were changed for literally all of eternity. Notice it says that Paul opened his mouth, Paul spoke to them. You know that what we know as the letters of the Apostle Paul, none of them have been written at this point but we have history here. In fact, we read all throughout the book of Acts when Paul opens his mouth, he doesn't just give his opinion,

he doesn't just give his agenda, the Bible says over and over again he opens up the scriptures, he goes back to the Old Testament, he "preaches unto them Jesus."

You see, when a life is changed, it happens because they have responded to the word of God, and yet you and I live in a culture today, we've done everything we know to do to eliminate the Bible out of our culture. We've tried to legislate it out. We've tried to use systems of power to remove it. We have almost become what Ray Bradbury, the great dystopian author predicted in "Fahrenheit 451," we've almost become a culture where the Bible is so rare that it is of great value. And yet it makes you wonder today why is it that our world is the way that it is? Could it be – please note my gift of sarcasm – that the one thing that can cure everybody's ills has been removed from their environment? Could it be that the possibility of the answers for our questions, could it be the possibility for the hope of our hopelessness we have systematically tried to discredit and to remove from our culture? We live in a world today where everybody is trying to find answers, everybody is trying to find cures, everybody is trying to hope that they can find out whatever it is to answer whatever issue they have, and yet what do we find here in Acts 16? Paul just spoke unto them Jesus. And yet we live in a culture today, it seems that any other answer but that one will do.

So how is it, how is it that their life was transformed? I want you to go to verse 30 and 31 here of Acts 16. This could be two of the most profound yet simplistic verses that you'll see in all of the New Testament. In verse 30, it says, "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Now forgive me for going Jeopardy on you for just a moment. You know the famous game show Jeopardy. Jeopardy is that game show where there is a board of answers that the contestants must supply the proper questions. The thing that's unique about Jeopardy is this, that you're supplying a question for the answer on the screen does not necessitate you get the credit, it has to match the category that it is in. What does he ask? "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The category is salvation. The category is forgiveness. The category is how do I know that one day when I breathe my last breath I will not descend into a place the Bible calls hell but I will dwell in a place the Bible calls heaven? What must I do?

That's an important question. I want you to notice what verse 31 does not say. It does not say you must be baptized. I said that in a Baptist church. It does not say you must tithe 10%. I said that in a Baptist church. It doesn't say you have to become a church member. Uh-oh, preacher, uh-oh, you've gone to meddling now. It doesn't say you have to quit doing that certain something, and it doesn't say you have to start doing that something something. Now hear me clearly: I believe once we're saved, the Lord leads us to follow in obedience to baptism. I think once we're saved, we want to be generous with our giving. I think once we're saved, we want to be a part of a local church. I think once we're saved, we have a desire to no longer sin. I think once we're saved, we have a desire to serve the things of God. But hear me clearly: you can be baptized, give 20%, be a member of every church in town and still one day go to hell. What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of the ills, all of the struggles, all of the baggage, all of the things that are happening our culture today are simply an issue with our heart problem. We all have a heart problem and yet what do we try to do? If I can just gain a little more time. If I can just gain a little more resources. If I can just gain a little more security. You do understand no matter how many more years you get, no matter how much money you attain, you one day will stand before God one day and it won't matter how long you were here or how much you had. What must I do to be saved? He said believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

Now the final question, it sounds very simplistic: so why is this such a big deal? Why is this so important? Because in the very next chapter, you're going to meet a guy by the name of Jason. You say, "Well, who is Jason?" Let me answer: I don't know but the Bible says he helps turn the world upside down. He doesn't possess some fancy title. He doesn't have some incredible church background. We just know that he's among a group of believers that turn the world upside down. Why is this so important? They turn the world upside down – hear me clearly, church – not because of their social positions, not because of their political affiliations, they didn't turn the world upside down because of their economic prowess. The world was turned upside down because they said in spite of our social issues, in spite of our political divide, and in spite of our economic disparity, until you have Jesus there's no business talking about any of that other stuff.

Why is this important? Because the faith community, can I get real personal for a moment? Go read the blogs, read the books, look at the social media posts. We spend more time talking about social issues than we do heavenly issues. We spend more time talking about what political side you're on than if you're going to be in heaven or hell. Guess what? Both sides of the aisles can be in heaven one day. That may shock some of y'all but it's true. Why? Because whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Listen to me, church. I'm all for social concerns, I'm all for political, yeah, I get all that stuff but it's not the most important thing. Who cares if everybody can sing Kumbayah around the campfire if everybody goes to hell? Who cares?

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Do you know what? Could it be, I like using that phrase, could it be that the reason we have so much social strife in our culture is because we're not preaching the gospel? Could it be that we have so much political divide because we're not preaching the gospel? Could it be that we have so much economic disparity because we're not preaching the gospel? You see, even we, the body of Christ, have gotten so caught up with the way the world does it, we've believed the lie that if we just out-social them, out-politic them, and out-economic them, then somehow, someway. No. What must I do to be saved? Find anywhere in verse 31 where there's a church or a "world activity." You won't. But what does he ask. I'm going to close with this. What does he ask in verse 30. What must I, listen, do. You see, in the back of his mind he thought somehow I've got to do something, I've got to join something, I've got to affiliate with something. What was their answer? Their answer had nothing to do with "do," did it? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

If you and I want to see the world turned upside down, all those peripheral issues need to stay on the outskirts and the gospel must be the primary message that undergirds every other message. It cannot be replaced. It cannot be usurped. It must be the message that every other message flows out of.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning as you hear from Acts 16, maybe if you were to, for lack of better terms, qualify yourself, maybe you're one of those persons that says, "Man, I'm much like that Lydia woman. I've been searching, searching, searching and not finding a thing." Or maybe you're like that young lady and say, "Man, I am so confused. I don't know which way is up and which way is down." Maybe you're that person today saying, "Do you know what? I just don't feel like there's hope to live another day. There's no reason for me to continue on." Here's the great news today: the Bible says that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It doesn't matter what the background is, it doesn't matter what the baggage is, it doesn't matter if you say, "But pastor, you don't know my story." It doesn't matter what your story is. His story is that he so loved you, he was willing to give his life so that if you were to believe on him, you would not perish but have everlasting life.

Maybe you're that person today whether here in person or on the other side of the camera, maybe you're that person who needs to just call on the name of the Lord. If that's you today, let me encourage you just to do so not necessarily out loud, not necessarily using the same words that I or somebody else might use, but maybe your heart's cry today would go something like this. "God, today I confess, God, I've got a sin problem. I have strayed from your plan for my life. I have rebelled against your instruction for my life and I realize it doesn't matter how much I do or how much I stop, it's not going to fix it. God, today I believe that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to be born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. And God, I believe that when Jesus Christ went to his cross, he was bearing the price of my sin. And God, I believe that three days later when the tomb was discovered empty, Jesus Christ had made it possible, made it feasible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the social problems, the political problems, and the economic problems, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, God, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today that that amazing grace that we sang about earlier has now been transferred into your life. Can we encourage you? In a moment after I pray and we stand and sing, just step out and step forward. We've got a whole team of folks that their story today is your story yesterday. They want to hear your story. They want to pray with you. They want to pray for you. But maybe today you're already a believer, maybe it's been years, maybe it's been decades, but maybe today you would be willing to confess that you've gotten caught up in the other issues. Maybe today you'd be willing to confess you thought if just the people in your community and your neighborhood and our culture would do A, B, and C, everything would work out. And maybe today realizing that walking out of here you need



to have the same focus as that one day when you stepped out and stepped forward and made the gospel the primary concern of your life.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you that you're still in the saving business, thank you that you're still in the forgiving business, thank you you're still in the healing business. Thank you, God, you're still in the life transforming business, that whatever "stuff we have," Lord, there's nothing you can't handle. Help us today to simply trust you with it all. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*