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REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul’s Second Missionary Journey, Part 2

Acts 16:11-24

November 18, 2007

- I. **Lydia is Converted**
- II. **The Slave Girl is Delivered**
- III. **Paul and Silas are Arrested and Imprisoned**

- ❑ Almost six years ago, one of the greatest economic collapses in U.S. history rocked the corporate world. So significant was this collapse, that the very name of the company is synonymous with corruption and greed to this day.
- ❑ On December 2, 2001, the energy giant Enron filed for bankruptcy. In the fallout of the Enron scandal, story after story emerged of people who had lost nearly all of their life’s savings. Tragically, many in this country and abroad bought in to the lie that, in some way, Enron was the one exception to the modern-Proverb “don’t put all of your eggs in one basket.”
- ❑ It seems like, in today’s volatile economy, this phrase of wisdom is repeated often.
- ❑ Yet, unfortunately, in our pluralistic culture we have applied this to the area of religion. In other words, we do not want to think that our entire salvation is found in one God [for this would be far too ignorant, arrogant and irresponsible]. Therefore, we affirm multiple “ways of salvation.”
- ❑ The problem with our society today is *not* that we are atheistic, that is, it is not that we do not believe in anything; rather, it is that we believe in everything. And to believe in everything is essentially to believe in nothing particular.
- ❑ It seems that most Americans, like the ancient Romans, would never even think to declare the exclusivity of One God [that too some may even be intolerant and therefore un-American!].

- ❑ Yet, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must arrive at the point in our lives where we come face to face with the truth that if Jesus Christ were to fail in *any* way and in the *slightest* manner, that we would be utterly ruined! We must embrace the truth that if Jesus is not the ONLY Way; we are without any hope! To some that is a terrifying thought; yet, Christ is the ONLY hope we have.
- ❑ Paul and Silas in their Second Missionary Journey, went into “uncharted territory” preaching the exclusivity of Christ and salvation through Him alone...and the outcome was never health and wealth.

I. Lydia is Converted

- ❑ In **Verses 16:11-12**, Luke writes, “So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; 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.”
- ❑ Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke sailed from Troas into Samothrace. This was the ancient site of a mystery cult that worshipped the twin fertility gods, the Cabiri. Samothrace was an island with 5,577 foot Mount Fengari, the place where Poseidon was said to have watched over Troy.
- ❑ After stopping off in Samothrace, they went on to Neapolis. From Neapolis, the missionary team would have likely taken the Via Egnatia to Philippi, some ten miles away.
- ❑ They soon arrived in Philippi, a “leading city” of Macedonia, being rich in copper, silver, and gold. Furthermore, it was an official Roman colony. In Philippi, the citizens participated in the imperial cult and worshipped many of the gods of the Roman/Greek Pantheon.
- ❑ Philippi, once known as Krenides was captured by Philip of Macedon [the father of Alexander the Great] in the fourth century B.C. Philip then renamed the city after himself. The city came under Roman control in 168 B.C. Later in 42 B.C. when Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius in a battle outside the city, it was enlarged. Finally, in 31 B.C. Octavian declared Philippi an official Roman colony.
- ❑ As a Roman colony, Philippi would have been like a “little Rome.” [Note: 80% of the inscriptions found in Philippi are in Latin; as opposed to Antioch where the percentage of Latin inscriptions was only 40%].
- ❑ “[Philippi] possessed the *ius Italicum*, which carried the right of freedom (*liberates*), that is, they were self-governing, independent of the provincial government; the right of exemption from tax (*immunitas*); and the right of holding land in full ownership, as under Roman law, and of using Italian legal procedures and precedents. In 16:16-40 we have a clear picture of this procedure and one, moreover, that belongs precisely to this time.”

David J. Williams, *International Biblical Commentary: Acts*

- In **Verse 13**, Luke writes, “And on the Sabbath day 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.”
 - Paul’s normal “strategy” involved locating the synagogue, the Jewish place of worship, in each city he went to, and preaching the Gospel there.
 - However, it seems that in Philippi there was no synagogue. The reason for this was because, in accordance with Jewish law and tradition, a minimum of ten Jewish men who were the heads of their households were required to establish a synagogue [*m. Abot* 3.7]. Therefore, there were likely not enough Jewish men in the city to establish a synagogue.
 - The river spoken of here was likely the Gangites [also known as the Angites] River. However, it could have also been a closer creek called Crenides. The Gangites [the most likely location] was just over a mile west of Philippi.
 - NOTE: At the present-day location of the ancient city of Philippi, the ruins of an arched gateway stand just outside the walls of the city. Many have suggested that this was the “gate” spoken of in Verse 13.
 - Some have also suggested that the women were meeting outside the *pomerium*, which was an area outside the city walls where no buildings were allowed to stand, no burials could take place, and no foreign or strange cults could be observed.
 - According to John Polhill, “The Romans were sometimes uneasy about foreign cults. Judaism was a recognized religion; but perhaps because there was no formally constituted synagogue, the women had to meet outside the city. If there were no Jews present and all the women were Gentile “God-fearers” like Lydia, this may have made their gathering even more suspect in the city.”
 - When the missionary team arrived at the place of prayer, they took the normal posture of speakers in a synagogue: when they addressed the women, they “sat down and began speaking...”
- Then Luke states, **Verse 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.”
 - Luke mentions a woman named Lydia from Thyatira. Interestingly, the city of Thyatira was located in the ancient region of Lydia. It is possible that Lydia was not exactly her actual personal name; rather, she could have been referred to in business as “Lydia” or the “Lyidan Lady” since she was from the Roman province of that same name.

- Luke states that she was a “worshipper of God,” which, in this context means that she, like Cornelius, was a Gentile who believed devoutly in the God of the Old Testament, while not becoming a full Jewish convert/proselyte.
- Another point that Luke makes regarding Lydia was that she was “a seller of purple fabrics...”
 - Purple clothing and goods were very expensive in the ancient world. Purple garments were worn by royalty and the wealthy and, as such, the purple dye business was quite lucrative.
 - “There were evidently two methods for producing the expensive purple dyes. One was to extract the color from the glands of the murex shell. This is the known method employed in the extensive dye industry at Sidon. Another method is still employed in the region of ancient Thyatira extracted the dye from the juice of the madder root.” John Polhill
 - Thus, Lydia was, no doubt, a wealthy woman.
- Yet, the most important point that Luke makes is “...[she] was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”
 - Luke writes that Lydia “was listening...” In other words, she could hear the words that Paul was saying; however, she could not understand...until “the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”
 - This “opening” of Lydia’s heart was the sovereign enabling of Lydia. This was, most assuredly, her regeneration.
 - Jesus, speaking to Nicodemus in John 3:4, states, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In other words, no one *has the ability* to see the kingdom of God apart from God’s sovereign regenerating or enabling.
 - Thus, although Lydia responded to the things of Paul, she only did so *after* the Lord opened her heart.
 - This is why we say **REGENERATION PRECEDES FAITH.**
 - This truth should propel us in our evangelistic efforts to remain faithful to our biblical calling that we are simply to proclaim the Gospel, and God will be glorified.

“Probably the hardest thought of all for our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help. We commonly represent Him as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring peace and salvation to the world...The God who works all things surely needs no help and no helpers [although He chooses to use His people]. Too many missionary appeals are based upon this fancied frustration of

Almighty God. An effective speaker can easily excite pity in his hearers, not only for the heathen but for the God who has tried so hard and so long to save them and has failed for want of support. I fear that thousands of young persons enter Christian service from no higher motive than to help deliver God from the embarrassing situation His love has gotten Him into and His limited abilities seem unable to get Him out of.” A.W. Tozer

- Following her expression of faith, Luke writes that **Verse 15**, “...when she [Lydia] 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.” And she prevailed upon us.”
 - Lydia was baptized and then “urged” the missionary team to stay in her house.
 - Here, Lydia demonstrates the Christian virtue of hospitality [Romans 12:3; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9].

“It was critical in the ancient world, where inns were often unsuitable for Christians to stay in. They were filthy, dangerous, expensive, and often little more than brothels. To make a home where travelers could be exposed to Christian love, family life, and fellowship was a high priority for Christian women (cf. 1 Timothy 5:9-10). Lydia’s hospitality gave proof that she was a truly liberated woman (cf. John 13:35).” John MacArthur

II. The Slave Girl is Delivered

- One day, when the missionaries were traveling from the home of Lydia to the place of prayer [by the river], “a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.”
 - In the original Greek text, the phrase translated “spirit of divination” literally says “a python spirit.”
 - The phrase “python spirit” finds its origin in Greek mythology.

“The reference is to the snake of classical mythology which guarded the temple of Apollo and the Delphic oracle at Mount Parnassus. Apollo [the Greek deity associated with prophecy and the giving of oracles] was thought to be embodied in the snake and to inspire “pythonesses,” his female devotees, with clairvoyance, although other people thought of them as ventriloquists. Luke does not commit himself to these superstitions, but he does regard the slave girl as possessed by an evil spirit.” John Stott

- Luke also states that “[she] was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.”
 - In modern-day terms, she was a fortune teller, or a medium.
 - She was believed to have had the unique ability to tell the future.

The ancient Greeks and the Romans had a true obsession with omens, signs, and divination. Military commanding officers and Emperors would always consult the divine oracles, such as the one at Delphi, prior to any major campaign or declaration. Thus, it is not surprising at all that a clairvoyant slave-girl would be a “gold mine” for her masters.

- In other words, this young girl earned a great deal of money for her masters.
- She was, indeed, **enslaved by both demonic forces and her greedy masters.**

NOTE: It is of great importance that the modern-day believer realize that the demon-possessed girl **could NOT truly tell the future.** Only God is omniscient, all-knowing. Only He can tell the future. Satan and his demons however, are great deceivers. They may have much more knowledge of the present and past than we do, but they can no more “see” into the future than humans can. They are limited as we are. Yet, in the case of the “slave-girl,” demonic forces spoke through her in such a way as to deceive those who paid her masters into believing that she could tell the future. In fact, one of the criteria of a **true prophet of God** is that all things that he says come true [Deuteronomy 18:22]. Thus, in the Old Testament, if someone spoke in the name of the LORD and everything he said came true, it could be assumed that he was a true prophet and God was speaking through him.

- Then, Luke states, in **Verse 17**, “Following after Paul and us, she [the slave-girl] kept crying out, saying, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”
 - As the young girl followed the missionary team, she was declaring that they were “bond-servants of the Most High God”.
 - **Yet the “problem” with this statement is that it could either be true or false.**
 - The term “Most High God” was an ancient term which referred to the Supreme Being. For the Jews, it was a reference to Yahweh; however, for the Gentile Greeks, it was a reference to Zeus.
 - Not only was the girl hailing them as “bond-servants of the most High God”, but they were saying that they were “proclaiming...the way of salvation.”
 - Just like the phrase “God Most High,” this statement, from the slave-girl’s perspective, could have been true or false.
 - In the ancient Greco-Roman world, many “saviors” emerged. Savior/Deliverer, salvation/deliverance were popular concepts and terms. Even the Roman Emperor often referred to himself as “savior” of the people.

- Yet, the girl’s words “proclaiming...the way of salvation” could also mean “**a way of salvation...**”. Therefore, this would only make her words even more confusing in the ears of her hearers.

- Therefore, the great concern was that, although the slave-girl’s statements were possibly true, they were open to great confusion and misunderstanding by the pagan Gentile hearers of Philippi.

“These acclamations may have been true enough, but they were open to too much misunderstanding for pagan hearers. The truth could not be so easily condensed for those from a polytheistic background. Jesus might be seen as just another savior in the bulging pantheon of Greek gods. So Paul, in a form reminiscent of Jesus’ exorcisms, commanded the spirit to exit the girl.”
 John Polhill

□ In today’s pluralistic culture, this is the great deceptive danger. Rarely do deceivers emerge that claim that God does not exist or that Jesus was a false prophet or liar. Rather, the deception occurs when those [who often call themselves “Christians”] leading men astray use **the same terminology as Christians**. They will speak of “believing in Jesus.” They will say that they worship and pray to God. They will say that they believe the Bible and read it daily.

- In fact, one of the most effective tactics of Mormonism today is to convince Christians that we are in basic agreement on most issues. Groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses will claim to love and read the Scriptures.
- In fact, Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light [2 Corinthians 11:13-14].
- Satan does not speak in 100% falsehood. Although this is what most people believe, it is simply untrue. **The truth is he is never 100% true**. There is enough truth in his work to deceive; yet, there is never enough truth to save.
- Again, Jesus Christ is not simply *a* way to salvation, He is *the* way!
- Yet, there is also a sense here where God is using His enemies to declare truth concerning His nature. For He is, indeed, the God Most High and the only way of salvation!

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- Luke continues **Verse 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.”
 - Luke writes that Paul was “annoyed.” The word could also mean “disturbed” or “burdened.”
 - Notice that Paul turned and said **to the spirit**, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!”

- Here Paul exercises his unique apostolic authority [which is essentially the power of Jesus Christ working through Paul as an apostle]. In other words, it was the **power of Christ** that called the spirit out from the girl.
- Luke then writes, **And it came out at that very moment**. The power and authority of Jesus Christ is completely irresistible...the spirit could not disobey.

III. Paul and Silas are Arrested and Imprisoned

- Then, **Verse 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."
 - Luke utilizes a 'play-on-words' here. The same verb [*exelthen*] is used to describe both the demon coming out of the girl and the profit from her services also going out.
 - Because their means of income had been taken away, the men became angry.
 - They cared more about their money than the welfare of the girl.
 - Even today, few things are more blinding than money. When a certain activity or occupation provides considerable income, even Christians today do what they can do justify the means.
 - The exorcism of this slave girl reveals that, ultimately, it is not she that is enslaved [by the demon]; but rather it is her masters who are enslaved by their money.
- Luke says that the masters of the slave-girl "dragged them into the **market place** before the authorities."
 - The market place, or the *agora* in Greek was the central public square in the Roman towns.

"[It was] the social center of the city. Here the unemployed waited for suitable work, the sick were healed, and the magistrates judged court cases. In those days, a plaintiff could drag a defendant into court and ask the judge to pass a verdict (James 2:6). The owners of the slave girl were acting according the Roman law when they laid their hands on Paul and Silas and put their grievances before the city authorities." Simon J. Kistemaker

- Moreover, in the *agora* was a judgment seat, a *bema*, where the magistrates would sit and render their judgment.
- In **Verses 20-21**, Luke explains what the basis of the charges were that the masters of the slave-girl brought before the magistrates: "...and when they had brought them to the

chief magistrates, they said, ‘These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.’”

“As Philippi was a Roman colony, its municipal administration, like that of Rome itself, was in the hands of two collegiate magistrates. The collegiate magistrates of a Roman colony were commonly called duumvirs...Before the two magistrates, then, Paul and Silas were dragged, and their accusers represented them as vagabond Jews who were causing disturbances in the city and inculcating customs which Roman citizens of all people could neither admit nor practice.”

F.F. Bruce

- The accusations of the slave-girl’s masters were, first of all, that Paul and Silas were “throwing our city into confusion...”
 - Ironically, it was the slave-girl, used by the masters, who was speaking in a manner that would confuse the Gentiles.
 - In fact, it is God who is a God of order, never confusion.
- Secondly, the masters bring up the fact that Paul and Silas were Jews.
 - Anti-Semitism was common in the ancient world. In fact, Emperor Claudius, around this time, issued a formal decree with the intent of ridding Rome of all Jews.
 - This could also help explain why Luke and Timothy were not seized as well [Luke was a Gentile, and Timothy was ½ Gentile].
- Thirdly, the missionaries were accused of “proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.”
 - Roman law forbade its citizens from practicing any religion that had not been officially sanctioned by the state.
 - Furthermore, the masters could perceive that what Paul did by exorcising the demon was, in itself, magic – something that was forbidden by Roman Law.

“[Paul and Silas have brought] in a foreign religion, in their accusers’ view, or, perhaps more accurately, a destructive foreign cult, given that Roman policy was one of religious tolerance unless a religion was seen as destructive to others.”

Darrell Bock

- ❑ **This policy bears a striking similarity to the general Western mindset today: We should be tolerant of every individual’s beliefs [as long as that belief does not condemn me! ~ *then* we are free to be intolerant!].**
- ❑ Another very real and practical concern of the Roman accusers and magistrates is that this “foreign religion” may pull the Roman citizens of Philippi away from their loyalties

to Rome and worship Caesar himself [in accordance with Roman law, her citizens were to pay homage to the Emperor].

- Recall, the charge of Jesus Christ that “stuck” with the Romans was NOT that He claimed to be the Son of God [many people claimed that]! The problem was that Jesus Christ claimed absolute exclusivity with respect to His authority – He and He alone was the King [of the Jews]; for, He is King of Kings [Luke 23:2, 5]!
- Ultimately, though, the concern could be this: that Paul’s exorcising of the young girl will cause her masters to lose their livelihood and income. This could be a factor in the destabilization of the local economy, thus introducing a degree of disruption into an otherwise stable Philippi.
 - In other words, pragmatism and stability were the rule of the day in Rome.
 - This is the great struggle many have with Christianity today: it may very well cause a “destabilization” in certain areas of one’s life ~ yet the eternal and spiritual blessings are immeasurable!
 - Tragically, we as believers today so often seek comfort and stability [even in our churches], rather than pursuing Christ. We do not want change, in fact we passionately resist it! We like things “the way they were.” Yet, the pursuit of Christ **necessitates change!**
 - Truly, as Francis Schaeffer once said, “We are back in Rome!”

- Then in **Verse 23**, “The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.”
 - After hearing the charges against Paul and Silas, the Roman magistrates **unjustly condemned them.**
 - The chief magistrates “tore their robes”...that is, they tore the robes off of Paul and Silas...stripping them in order to beat them.
 - Then the magistrates handed the men over to the officers or *lictors*, as they were called.
 - Each lictor, or law enforcement officer, carried a bundle of rods with an axe protruding from the middle, tied together with a red band called the *fascis* [Mussolini, in the 20th century used this symbol for his “fascist” movement].
 - Ironically, this bundle of rods was the symbol for Roman justice.

- It was these bundle of rods that the lictors would have used to beat Paul and Silas.
 - This scene probably is one of the three instances mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:25.
- Once the two men were beaten, **Verses 23-24**, “they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”
- In short, Paul and Silas were placed under maximum security. It is actually quite interesting that these pagan magistrates and law enforcement officers realized a great truth: Christianity was a threat to their pagan culture and lifestyle, just as it was a threat to the masters who profited from the demon-possessed slave-girl.
 - Paul and Silas were treated as though they had committed a most serious crime, for they were thrown into the “inner prison;” that is, in today’s vernacular, a dungeon.
 - Not only this, they had their feet fastened in the stocks. The wooden stocks were probably attached to the wall. These stocks were used as torture devices, stretching the body and creating excruciating pain.
 - Paul and Silas’ extreme imprisonment, however, is providential. For the greater the security of these men by other men, the greater the miracle will be when God delivers them.

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- Yet, this passage highlights a biblical truth that too few of us have grasped: when we are in the will of the LORD, His “divine favor” may include imprisonment!
- Had modern day Christians found themselves in Paul and Silas’ place, we would probably ask ourselves, “What did we do *wrong* to deserve this?” “Didn’t we want to go to Asia, and didn’t God, through a vision, call us to Macedonia?”
- In other words, too many of us look at our circumstances, and if they are good, then God must be blessing me and I must be in His will; and if my circumstances are bad, I must have “missed a turn” somewhere.
- Paul and Silas’ obedience led them to receive a severe beating and imprisonment.
- In one of the great sermons from Charles Spurgeon, he writes of so-called divine **Providence** in the midst of our sin. If we see that getting what we want is divine Providence and God’s blessing, then this simply becomes a license to sin as we wish:

“There could hardly ever be a more remarkable instance of apparently Providential cooperation than we have here! Jonah wants to go to Tarshish and having selected that place as the region of

his hiding, he must go down to Joppa, on the Mediterranean sea. He walks on the wharf and the first thing he sees is a ship going to Tarshish! Is not that Providence? Boats did not often make that voyage. Do we not confess that it is Providence when we learn that the vessel will take passengers at a set fare? Jonah wants to go to Tarshish and the very day that he gets to Joppa, a decked vessel is about to start for the remote region which he desired to reach! No one can refuse to see an apparent Providence. This is often used as a cover for wicked actions. 'I could not do otherwise,' says one. 'Providence seemed to point in that way. I should have been flying in the face of God if I had not done as I have done.' Ah, me! How base is man to seek to saddle his sin upon God! How grossly you deceive yourself!

"...I have seen a man in trade doing certain tricky things and he has tried to make it out that the circumstances compelled him to do it. 'Such-and-such a person walked in just at that time and said certain things—and another event occurred so remarkably pat to the case that it all looked like a Providential arrangement—and everyone who saw it would have thought so.' Nonsense!

"Nothing can make it right to do wrong! I pray you, never blaspheme God by laying your sins on the back of His Providence! This is an act of daring presumption and profanity. You will never see a Providence more remarkable than that which occurred to Jonah and yet Jonah, for all that, was rebelling against the Lord in going down to Tarshish!

"Providence or no Providence, the Word of the Lord is to be our guide and we must not depart from it under pretext of necessity or circumstances. **It is very easy to make up a Providence when you want to do so. If you sit down and try to find, in the ways of God, an excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart, together, will soon conjure up a plea for Providence.**"

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- May we always seek to walk in obedience and trust in the LORD, knowing that we may lose all things, but it is for the sake of the Gospel.