

## Confrontation of the Python Spirit Acts 16:16-24

By Phillip G. Kayser

In this passage we come to the third example of what some people call high level spiritual warfare in the book of Acts. The first example was Peter's confrontation of the sorcerer, Simon Magus. That was in chapter 8. The demon inhabiting Simon Magus had complete control over the whole region of Samaria. And that confrontation completely opened the region up. It's called high-level spiritual warfare because it is taking on the demonic prince of a given area. The second high-level confrontation was in Acts 13, when Paul demonstrated the power of God against the sorcerer Elymas. This confrontation freed the civil magistrate, Sergius Paulus from bondage and (again) opened that whole new region to the Gospel. But (and I think this is a significant but) from 30 AD – 50 AD (that's 20 years of missions work), there are only three recorded examples of this kind of warfare. (There will be another one in chapter 19.) This in itself should warn us against focusing as much attention on such warfare as C. Peter Wagner and other Mapping enthusiasts have done. There are some people who are constantly traveling to cities and trying to discern the name of the strongman of that city, and trying to break the strongman's power. I just don't see Paul eagerly and deliberately tackling high-level demonic principalities like that, unless the Lord so led.

On the other hand, this *is* the third example of high-level spiritual warfare in the book of Acts. And this should warn us against the opposite extreme of those who think we can totally ignore this and never confront the demon prince of a region. There is one more example in chapter 19. So we can't over-

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react and say that no one should take on the principalities of a city. Down through history, God has led missionaries to cut down a sacred tree or in other ways to slap a demonic strong man in the face and claim that territory for King Jesus.

And I think this passage is a wonderful passage to correct the two extremes you can find on this subject. It is terribly dangerous to rush in where angels fear to tread. I have seen strong Christian workers who have themselves become demonized because they have flaunted themselves before demonic strongholds. We have authority in Christ, but if you go in with sins unconfessed or without adequate prayer covering or without the Lord's OK, you can easily become a sitting target. On the other hand, when God calls us to confront such demons, it is important to realize that He has promised us His awesome power. He told seventy of his disciples in Luke 10:19, **Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and [get this phrase] over all the power of the enemy...** That's an all-inclusive promise – *all* the power of the enemy. Even strongholds of the strongest demons can be taken on when God clearly guides us to do so. And so a passage like this can be very encouraging. And we are going to be seeing that this is not just academic.

## I. The reality of demonic power (v. 16)

Let's look first of all at the reality of demonic power in the world. There are some Christians who just scoff at stories of casting out demons. In fact, I have one missions book that was required reading in Bible College, and in many ways was a remarkably helpful book. But the guy thought demons were not real. He treated them as superstitions that the Gospel dispelled. No way!

### A. *The girl was "possessed" by a spirit*

Notice that verse 16 says, **Now it happened, as we**

went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us... It doesn't say that she had a mental illness. It doesn't say that she *thought* she had a spirit, or that *Paul* thought she had a spirit, or that the *crowds* thought that she had a spirit. It doesn't say that Paul helped her banish that superstition. The text is quite clear that she was possessed by a spirit. That's Luke writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The author of that book I mentioned believed that the New Testament writers were just using language of the culture to accommodate the superstitions of the people. In effect, the claim is that Paul was saying, "Whatever spirits you might believe are afflicting you, fine - if you will simply believe the Gospel, you can find peace from those metaphorical spirits." The claim is that Paul knew that there were no such spirits, but (they say) a belief in a spirit is just as real as if a spirit existed, and the Gospel helped people get rid of such superstitions. Well, that is baloney. That is liberalism. That is a denial of the supernatural. Let's take the text at face value - she was possessed by a spirit. These spirits are elsewhere called demons. They are fallen angels who are war with God and with God's kingdom. And according to the book of Revelation there are hundreds of millions of such demons. Just one army at the Euphrates had 200,000,000 demons. And there were other armies. Demons are everywhere. Based on the New Testament evidence, there is probably not a week when you are not confronted with at least minor, low-level demons.

**B. The spirit had a name – “Python”<sup>1</sup>**

But this spirit had a name. His name was Python. It took on the name of the python snake. In fact, why don't you go ahead and look at the footnote in your outlines. It says,

The word for “divination” is literally “Python,” the spirit of divination that controlled the Oracle of Delphi on the 7<sup>th</sup> of every month. Thus, F.F. Bruce says, “She is described by Luke as ‘having a pythonic spirit’ or being a ‘pythoness’ – that is, a person inspired by Apollo, the Greek deity specially associated with the giving of oracles, who was worshiped as the ‘Pythian’ god at the oracular shrine of Delphi in central Greece.” William Hendriksen writes, “she had a spirit called Python.”

And I list some other commentaries that show that this was not an ordinary demon. This demon had a stronghold over the countries of Greece and Macedonia. In fact, the whole world knew about the spirit Python that was at Delphi. He was very famous. And he traveled to other spots in Greece and Macedonia. He only gave his oracle at Delphi on the 7<sup>th</sup> of each month. Paul will press into the territories of Python until the Gospel eventually conquers the Delphic stronghold itself. But this is the first confrontation with this strong and influential

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spirit.

### *C. Python was a spirit of divination*

Next, I want you to notice that Luke is not in the least embarrassed to say that there really is such a thing as fortune-telling. The Greek word for fortune-telling means to prophesy, be a mouthpiece for a spirit and/or to tell the future. F F Bruce said, “This girl’s involuntary utterances were regarded as the voice of the god, and she was thus much in demand by people who wished to have their fortunes told or to receive information or advice which they believed could be supplied from such a source” (p. 312). I want you to notice that the text doesn’t say that she was a fake, or a good guesser, or superstitious. She was actually possessed by a spirit of divination and this demon was so good that the girl made her masters lots of money. People don’t pay money for fortunetellers whose ‘guesstimates’ are as good as weather forecasters. Not to speak poorly of weather forecasters, but are wrong just about as much as they are right, and they have all kinds of technology at their disposal, but these spirits of divination are good enough that people actually pay lots of money to use them. They aren’t 100% accurate like a Biblical prophet was, but they are many times upwards of 80% accurate. The Old Testament over and over assumes that demons can tell fortunes, but absolutely forbids God’s people from visiting them. We shouldn’t visit them even out of curiosity. They are dangerous. These demons really exist.

Let me give you one example of a modern fortuneteller who has been quite popular and has been closely studied by scientists. Newsweek reported,

It was a phone-in time on radio station KCMO in Kansas City. “Mr. Hoy,” lisped a woman caller, “my false teeth are missing. Can you figure out where they are?” David Hoy, KCMO’s guest expert in extrasensory perception, needed

only a few seconds to decipher what he calls his ‘ESP flash.’ ‘Your dog got them and put them under the stove,’ he confidently informed her. ‘Would you go check and see?’ She did and found her bridge where Hoy said it was.”

You might question whether this was staged, but Hoy and others like him have been tested in controlled environments over and over again. The myth buster, James Randi, has not been able to touch Hoy. And Hoy didn’t just help people find things. He gave all kinds of facts about people that he couldn’t have known on his own. He made numerous accurate prophecies. Let me give you one example. On October 31, 1967 he was on KDKA radio in Pittsburgh. He said,

Within sixty days a bridge spanning the Ohio River will collapse with tremendous loss of life. It will be brought out, after the collapse, that eighteen months before, a heavily laden barge going upriver had hit a major pylon of the bridge, backed up, and gone on without reporting the incident.

37 days later, the Silver Bridge collapsed during the peak hours of Christmas shopping, with a dozen people being killed. A subsequent investigation revealed that a barge had done exactly what Hoy says it would do. I don’t think demons know the future infallibly. They make mistakes. But here was a case where the demons already knew that the bridge had been hit by a barge (remember? 18 months before it falls, the bridge has been hit. Well, he only prophesied the bridge falling 37 days before it did, so 18 months before, the demons must have seen the bridge hit, seen it back up and go on without reporting it. The demons were able to figure out that the pylon was weakened and it would soon fail. So they were able to predict that within a certain window of time the bridge would collapse, causing death. Who knows, maybe they helped it collapse. So in that sense, it is not truly prophecy. But the

demons gave Hoy knowledge he would not otherwise have had. It truly was fortune telling.

There are thousands of psychics that I could have used to illustrate this, but I picked Hoy because of his interesting background. For years he used to be a Christian pastor. He grew up a Southern Baptist, was the son of a pastor, attended Bob Jones University (a fundamentalistic university), and then graduated from Southern Seminary. He became a missionary to Brazil. All through this time he had the ability to tell the future. Many of his friends thought he had the gift of prophecy, but it was clearly demonic (as became very evident later in life). Later he worked at Calvary Baptist Church in New York, and met a pianist who was studying at Julliard School of Music. This guy tried to interest Hoy in occult, astrology, numerology and tarot cards because of the similarities with what Hoy was experiencing. But Hoy resisted that, thinking that all of this could just be scientifically explained. But listen to this interesting story of the dangers of failing to take seriously the demonic (and I am quoting from Gary North's book, *Unholy Spirits*).

During his time on the mission field in Brazil, he attended a Voodoo ceremony out of curiosity. He kept returning to the all-night sessions of dancing, rhythms, and ecstatic outpourings. He was fascinated by the fact that glowing coals could be placed on the bodies of ecstatic worshippers, leaving no scars and producing no pain. He saw the priestess pick up a scorpion with her mouth without being stung; he watched her tell the color of a cloth placed in her hand while she was bandaged around the eyes. Once, she even hexed him mildly. She asked him to hold out his hand, fingers stiff and spread apart, and when she opened her own hand and touched his, palm-to-palm, he was subsequently unable to close his fist. His fingers were frozen. Finally, she touched his hand again,

and his muscles relaxed. On one occasion, he explained to her that he was a Christian missionary, and she replied: 'You no belong to them. You belong to us.' She turned out to be a prophet; not long thereafter, Hoy left the ministry.

Hoy predicted that President Johnson would not run again the following year and that Jackie Kennedy would marry a Greek shipping magnate. How would he know that? Well, maybe the demons manipulated Johnson into not running, and made Jackie Kennedy the Aristotle Onassis infatuated with each other. Who knows? But Hoy would accurately predict the outcome of College games, point out whose locker stolen property was in, and many other things that the Bible would speak of as fortune telling. Was he always accurate? No. He had an 80% accuracy of predicting the future and was much higher on present things. This is about the highest accuracy rate that psychics claim to have. It is nothing like Biblical prophecy, which is always 100% accurate all the time. But these psychics are everywhere in America. There are thirteen psychics who make a good living in Omaha, and numerous other professionals whose powers come from demons. And I believe that at least some of charismatic prophecies have all the markings of the demonic about them. Like this Christian guy named Hoy they use demons for their extra knowledge. And the Bible warns that such false prophets would arise. I'm not saying all of them are, but I am saying, "Watch out."

If you don't believe this kind of thing really happens, you have your head in the sand. So point number 1 is that demonic power is real, and it is dangerous. Over and over again in the Old Testament we are warned to stay far away from it because of its danger. Christians will sometimes go to a fortune reader at a fair "just for the fun of it." And the Old Testament says, "Don't!"



## II. The control that Python had (v. 16)

### A. *The slave girl*

Next, I want you to notice the control that Python had in this culture. It is first of all obvious that he had control of this girl. The text says so. She was possessed by a demon. The human masters may have thought that *they* owned her, but she was really owned and controlled and in slavery to the demon. She was a pawn in the demon's hands. She could not help herself. All day long she would holler this prophecy. The masters couldn't make her do something else.

### B. *The "masters" – a lucrative joint venture*

Second, the masters of this girl who were making a fortune off of her were controlled by the demon. They may have thought they had this demon in a box. They were certainly making a lucrative trade from this girl. It appears that this girl was so profitable, that it took several masters to raise the money to buy her. That's how valuable she was. So she is owned by a joint venture. But you know what? They aren't really in control like they think they are. They are playing with fire. As we will see in verse 19, the demonic makes these masters lash out at Paul. They are simply tools in the hands of Satan. In John 8 Jesus told the Pharisees (who thought they were free), that they were indeed total slaves to sin and to Satan. And then he said, **You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.** They think their hatred and persecution of Jesus was their own desires, but they were really doing Satan's desires. Satan stirred up these emotions. And that is what is going on in this passage.

### C. *The countries of Greece and Macedonia (see footnote 1; see Dan. 10:13,20)*

But since Paul explicitly calls this demon "Python," he was

identifying what all Greeks knew was the god Apollo. Anybody who read this text in Greek back then would know it. And I already read footnote 1 to that effect. So again we are not talking about just any ordinary demon. This was a demon that had the whole of Greece and Macedonia as a stronghold. This was the territory that Satan assigned to this strongman. And if you don't think that demons have territories assigned to them, look at Daniel 10:13 sometime which speaks of the demonic prince of Persia, or Daniel 10:20 which speaks of the demonic prince of Greece. There are strongmen set over given territories like cities, states and countries.

When Paul cast the demon out here, Satan's kingdom took a huge blow. Of course, Python is not yet conquered, but it is obvious who is stronger. Even though his days were numbered, Python is still going to maintain control of the land and do everything in his might to resist Paul's advance of the gospel. It will explain a lot of the persecution that comes up in the next chapters.

### III. Python's deceptive techniques (v. 17)

- A. Python knows that keeping the Gospel out is hopeless; instead he seeks to undermine it. Make no mistake; these true words are still an attack against the Gospel.*

But let's look at verse 17. You might wonder why in the world a demon of such magnitude would advertize true servants of God and the true gospel. It says, **This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaims to us the way of salvation."** You would think that would be self-defeating. It almost seems as if the demon is helping Paul and his team. But demons are sly, and they will use the truth if need be to deceive people.

Here's what I believe is going on. Python knows that

keeping the Gospel out of Macedonia and Greece is hopeless. He's not even going to try to do that. He's no doubt got reports from other demons of how hopeless it has been to keep the Gospel out of Galatia and other regions. So Python, sly devil that he is, is seeking to do another tactic *by going with the flow*.

***B. Satan is notorious for his tactic of associating with true Christians and churches, and from that position to undermine the faith.***

He is going to try to appear to actually be on Paul's team and take credit for Paul's successes. If he can associate with and infiltrate the true faith, he can do more damage from within than he could do from outside. So why not appear to be a messenger of the Gospel. So he makes the girl cry out, **"These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."** Demons can tell the truth on occasion. Satan gave some Scripture truth to Jesus when he tempted him. And it wasn't the only time. Mark 3:11 says, **And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God.** You might think that Jesus would be happy with that, but Jesus tells them to be quiet and come out of the person. Jesus is not going to leave them alone just because they are telling the truth. So they can sometimes tell the truth, but it is for deceptive purposes. They are always battling against the Gospel, but their tactics are different. And Paul doesn't like this kind of advertising.

***C. He seeks to gain credibility by speaking the truth, but with deceptive purposes - to get citizens to continue following him after they believe the Gospel.***

1. Those who feared demonic activity would now avoid the Gospel too.

You see, by telling the truth in strategic ways, Satan can

gain credibility. Truth mixed with lies is much more dangerous than outright, obvious lies. So this demon tells the truth.

But in doing this he could also scare people off. Those who feared the great power of this demon would now avoid the Gospel too.

**2. Those who used demonic divination, but who would come to the Gospel, might be tempted to think they can hold to both worlds.**

And others who liked demonic divination might be tempted to think that they could hold the Gospel and still hold to divination. That's what Simon the sorcerer thought in Acts 8. And down through history this has been a tactic that Satan has constantly used. He comes into churches like this one and gets people to believe that they can have their cake and eat it too; they can mess with the world and still be saved; they can have benefits of Python and still have the benefits of the Gospel. And they are doubly damned in their deception.

#### **IV. Paul's confrontation (v. 18)**

***A. Notice that Paul does not eagerly seek out this confrontation (v. 18a)***

Well this greatly irritates Paul. But I want you to notice something in verse 18. He didn't jump the gun and instantly confront the demon. It says, **And this she did for many days**. Why didn't Paul cast the demon out the moment this girl started following them around? Why did he wait so many days? It's quite different from the way some people instantly try to jump into a deliverance ministry. We don't have power in our own selves. Our only power is God's power, and so it behooves us to wait for God's timing.

***B. Notice that Paul knew the critical need of prayer (v. 16a)***

Backing up to verse 16, I also want you to see that Paul realizes the critical need of prayer. Verse 16 says, **Now it happened, as we went to prayer...** Paul didn't know when the confrontation would happen, but he knew that he needed prayer covering, and the tiny church engaged their souls continually in spiritual warfare prayer. They no doubt confessed their sins and asked for God's guidance, and prayed for His protection. If we think we can go into battle without prayer covering, we are fooling ourselves. When people are indeed called by God for such high level spiritual confrontations, they bathe the city or place in prayer. They know that is their only hope for weakening the demon's hold and for gaining spiritual ability to engage that demon in battle.

And even on low-level warfare (which is the only kind I have engaged in) I ask for prayer back-up when I am casting out demons. I always make sure that I am confessed-up on sin. I can give you several stories of missionaries and pastors who began to be afflicted by the very demon they tried to cast out because they were living in sin and refusing to abandon it. You have no power when you grieve the Holy Spirit because you don't have His protection. It was not until they got right with God that they found freedom from these attacks and had renewed power. If prayerlessness shows pride and self-sufficiency ("I can do this on my own"), a prayer saturated life shows humility and dependence upon God. Such a humble spirit says with Moses, **If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here** (Ex. 33:15).

### *C. Paul is waiting for God's timing.*

I believe that there is a perfect timing for everything, and what Paul is waiting on is for God to give him the go-ahead; to give the green light. God's timing is always best. And Paul may have wondered why God was waiting so long. But in hindsight it appears that this girl was drawing attention to the team in a

way that would 1) show God's power over Macedonia's strongest power and 2) get Paul and Silas thrown in jail. God has an elect man in jail that won't get converted without Paul and Silas being there. So this is also part of God's strategy and plan.

***D. It is proper to be annoyed with Satan.***

Another thing that I learn from this passage is that it is proper to be annoyed with Satan. Verse 18 continues, **But Paul, being greatly annoyed...** Do you get annoyed over the works of Satan? Paul was constantly troubled over the idolatry he faced. In chapter 17:16 it says, **Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.** It is a sign of health when the idols and gross sins of our nation provoke us and annoy us and grieve us. And if we aren't bothered in the least, there is something seriously wrong with our Christianity. Even compromised Lot (and I think everyone would admit that he was pretty compromised) – even he showed his Christianity by being vexed in Sodom. 2 Peter 2:8 says, **Lot dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds.** In context Peter explains that this showed that he was a true believer. It is a good indicator when you are annoyed with righteous indignation that Satan is having a hay day in our country.

***E. Notice that Paul directly addressed the demon.***

Notice too that Paul directly addresses the demon. This is very instructive. There has been controversy in some circles about whether Christians can speak directly to demons when they cast them out, or if they must only pray to God. In fact, Powlison has written a book called, *Power Encounters*, which denies that we may every engage demons this way. Well, all

you have to do is read the Gospels and the book of Acts and it is quite clear that Jesus commanded the demons to leave over and over. He spoke to them. He didn't just pray. He commanded demons to leave. You might say, "Well, He is God." It is true, but He cast out demons as our example, and told the twelve disciples to imitate Him. Then he told the 70 disciples the same thing in Luke 10. So I side with the vast majority of those who actually work with the demonized (who aren't just theoreticians) in saying that it is perfectly appropriate to command demons to leave. In fact, they probably won't if you don't. If you have been taught otherwise, I would be happy to dialogue with you further on this. Powlison is flat out wrong, and I can give you a point-by-point refutation of his positions. But this would be one verse.

*F. Notice that Paul had no authority in himself, but cast the demon out in the name of Jesus Christ.*

But notice that Paul has no authority in himself. Verse 18 says that Paul turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." Everything we do must be done in the name of Jesus. Every spiritual blessing, every power, every resource is hidden in Christ, and apart from His name we have no power. Colossians 3:17 says, **And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.** Demons won't listen to you if you do not invoke the name and authority of Jesus.

*G. Notice that the demon came out within the hour.*

And notice that verse 18 says, **And he came out that very hour.** By saying, "that very hour" (instead of that very moment) it may imply (though not necessarily) that there had been a tussle. Not all demons come out instantaneously. Even

with Jesus, sometimes the demons argued with Him. But in any case, it shows the power of God working through Paul to conquer the stranglehold that this powerful demon had over the young girl's life.

## V. There is always backlash when we engage in power encounters

### A. *Notice that as long the girl's masters were making money, they left Paul alone (v. 19a).*

The last thing that I want to quickly point out is that there is always backlash when we engage in power encounters. You can count on it. As long as the girl was making the masters money, they left Paul alone, but verse 19 says, **But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place to the authorities.** They were ticked off because of a lost investment – and since this was a joint venture, it must have been a considerable investment.

### B. *But “her masters” are themselves pawns of Satan's kingdom (v. 19)*

But I believe ultimately they were pawns in Satan's hands. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul says, **we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.** In his commentary on that passage, William Hendriksen asks, “Just how did Satan do this? By influencing the minds of the politarchs at Thessalonica, so that they would have caused Jason to forfeit his bond (Acts 17:9) in case the missionaries had returned? By bringing about sufficient amount of tangible trouble elsewhere so that neither Paul alone nor all three were able to return? ... The fact as such that Satan exerts a powerful influence over the affairs of men, especially when they endeavor to promote the interests of the kingdom of God, is sufficiently clear from other passages...” and he proceeds to



give several examples that we ultimately are not wrestling with flesh and blood, but with demonic hosts. We need to keep this in mind when bills such as LB 1141 are introduced into the Nebraska legislature. This has the fingerprints of Satan all over it, and we need to be in prayer against demonic forces. Just as this girl's masters were in reality Satan's pawns, some of our tyrannical masters in Lincoln and Washington, DC are often pawns of Satan. If we just war with legislators, we are missing the most important part of the battle – spirits that hover around them and influence them.

***C. Notice that Satan seeks to use magistrates to impose control (v. 19b)***

Notice how this demon and his minions use the magistrates to impose control over the situation. Satan has never been able to win a debate on an even playing field. Truth will always triumph if it is given a fair hearing. So what Satan does when he is losing an argument is to use force. There is always the power of the sword in his pocket. And we ought not to be surprised to find homosexuals and others trying to force their agendas down our throats with the power of civil magistrates. And it is such persecution that he raises up in verse 19.

***D. They use the edict of emperor Claudius from the year before (vv. 20-21) to persecute Paul and Silas.***

In verses 20-21 we see them appealing to the edict of Claudius that chapter 18:2 mentions. **And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe. The law he appeals to was the emperor's law. The year before, in AD 49, Emperor Claudius had made an edict that all Jews must leave Rome. We saw last**

week that since colonies like Philippi were directly under Rome's control and were extensions of Rome, the decree applied to Philippi. This means that it was illegal for Jews to be in this city.

Just as a side note, this is one of many verses you could use to justify illegally entering countries to bring the Gospel. Paul's team was violating the emperor's edict, and since the edict had been published a year before, they couldn't plead ignorance. But God's mandate to bring the gospel to every nation supersedes any human laws. Brother Andrew, the bible smuggler, has been under constant criticism from ignorant evangelicals for disobeying the laws of countries that are trying to keep Christianity out. But he stands in a good tradition of the apostles and 2000 years of church history.

### *E. A mob is incited (v. 22)*

Verse 22 shows the entire mob being incited. **Then the multitude rose up together against them;** Crowds can be easily incited and manipulated to violence through false information. It is the reason why lynchings are often regretted after the fact, but the heat of emotion at the time makes a crowd do irrational things. Then the excitement of the moment makes the magistrates assume they are guilty. It is sad but true that to this day, magistrates often make decisions based on the mood of the people. And when both the majority and the magistrates are against an individual, it is easy for even Christians to assume that they are guilty. I have seen this happen too many times. Proverbs warns us that the first one to plead a cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him" (Prov. 18:17). Don't let yourself get wrapped up in political anger in either defending or accusing candidates without careful study. Don't let yourself make judgments against Christians (like the two women in jail in Lincoln) simply because the magistrate and media make those pro-lifers look

bad. Learn caution from this passage.

***F. They are beaten (v. 23)***

Then they are beaten: **and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.** If you have read much about caning in Singapore, you know that this must have left Paul and Silas in excruciating pain. Ministering in the power of God does not mean that we will not suffer. No Christian is exempt from suffering for the cause of Christ. In fact, according to the Bible, it is a glory to be able to so suffer. In doing so Paul says that we are filling up the sufferings of Christ, and laying up for ourselves more enduring treasures in heaven.

***G. They are imprisoned (vv. 23b-24)***

And then they are imprisoned. Verse 23-24 say, **And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailor to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.** They were already in pain from the caning, but there would be no one to wash their wounds and care for them. Instead, they are thrown into a filthy cell, and put into the stocks. Stocks stretched the legs wide apart and then clamped the feet into this position. It was an extremely uncomfortable joint-aching position to be in, even without a body wracked with pain. This sets the context for the next sermon in Acts when they rejoice before God with songs of praise. Would you have been able to praise God in circumstances such as these? When God's Spirit indwells you, He gives you a power and a joy that transcends our circumstances. It is a powerful grace that we should long for and ask God for.

In all of this it may have looked like Paul won round 1 – casting the demon out, and that Satan won round 2 – beating them and casting them into jail and getting them kicked out of

the city. But God was sovereignly in control of even this so that the Gospel could come to a government official. Are you willing to face such suffering if you know that God is winning rounds 1,2 and 3? If we can raise up a Gideon's army of men, women and children who are sold out to Jesus like Paul was, we can turn this nation around just as Macedonia and Greece were won to the Gospel. Satan is no match for a church that is full of the Holy Spirit and careless about our own wellbeing if God is glorified. I want to be such a saint, and it is my prayer that you will be such saints so that the strongholds in our city will be confronted and eventually defeated. And may God receive all the glory. Amen.