

Acts 16B

- We step back into a moment with Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke as Paul confronts a slave girl indwelt by a demon

[Acts 16:16](#) 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.

[Acts 16:17](#) 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."

[Acts 16:18](#) 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.

- Last week we focused on why Paul tolerates the girl's outbursts for a time but then change his mind and run the demon out of the girl later
 - We know Paul was annoyed (or the Greek literally means worn out)
 - We concluded that at some point the woman's yelling stopped being an advantage to Paul's ministry in the way it attracted a crowd
 - And it became a hindrance
 - Once the work of the Gospel has taken hold in the hearts of the people, the signs and miracles and demonic marketing cease
 - Paul doesn't want the truth of God's word to compete with sensational proclamations or sideshows
 - Nor would he have wanted the woman's demonic and fortune-telling past to become too closely associated with the message of the gospel
- So Paul acts to rescue the young woman and himself from this predicament
 - But that's not the end of the affair

[Acts 16:19](#) ¶ But 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,

[Acts 16:20](#) and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,

[Acts 16:21](#) and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."

- This story is part of a larger narrative that Luke is just beginning
 - The basic theme is Paul preaching, the Greek believing, the Jews persecuting
 - Here we see the seeds of that pattern
 - First, Paul is preaching, but in this case his preaching included a healing that upset some locals
 - From this encounter comes an accusation that starts the pattern
 - The problem that starts the encounter is simple enough
 - The girl had her demon removed, so she can no longer speak prophetically
 - Consider this simple event for just a second
 - God has the power to direct the demons, and did so through Paul's words
 - Paul simply spoke words that we assume he felt the Spirit giving him
 - And based on words alone, the spirit realm was moved against its will
 - And as the demons left, so did her powers to tell fortune
 - This event is a powerful reminder of two facts
 - First, the demon realm is real
 - As real as this pulpit and our own bodies
 - We can't see demons and we don't normally encounter them, but they are around

- And they operate through the physical realm including in the bodies of other people
- These people aren't necessarily aware of the demon's presence and they are not able to push the demon away
 - They are unwitting hosts

[Matt. 12:43](#) "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it.

[Matt. 12:44](#) "Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.

[Matt. 12:45](#) "Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation."

- This is still their pattern today
 - When we encounter people who seems to access supernatural power, remember that they may be accessing a power other than God
- Secondly, the God we serve can direct them as easily as He directs anything in His creation
 - They do not hold equal power with Him
 - If they make their mark in our lives, it is merely because God permitted it
 - And when God is ready to dismiss them, they obey without exception
- In this case, the departure of the demon rendered the girl useless to her masters, so they attack back to Paul and Silas
 - There is an important detail to notice in vs.20-21
 - They note that Paul and Silas are Jews
 - And that they were throwing the city into confusion
 - Teaching things that are unlawful for Romans to do
 - If these charges had any merit at all (doubtful), it would have been because it was illegal under Romans for someone to persuade a Roman to leave Emperor worship

- So perhaps Paul was accused of teaching something illegal because of this law
 - More importantly, the accusers essentially claim that it is a Jewish problem
 - By pointedly noting Paul's Jewishness, the men are appealing to anti-Semitism
 - They are claiming that the problem is more than just a Christian message
 - After all, they didn't understand the distinction at this point
 - They were just mad about losing their income
 - So they say this is a Jewish problem, potentially stirring up the city against the Jews as a whole
- This accusation is so important to this section in Acts because it goes a long way to explaining the persecution that will come from the Jews
 - Remember these are Hellenistic Jews, and as such they were much less likely to be upset at Paul's message
 - Wherever Paul has gone so far in the Diaspora, he has seen relatively little Jewish persecution
 - Some received his message, most ignored it, a few Jews were upset at times, but there was little organized opposition
 - Now we have the seeds for organized Jewish persecution that was about to rise within the Hellenistic Jewish population
 - As these men declared that Paul's words were a threat to the Roman empire, they laid blame at the feet of Jews as a whole
 - The Jewish religion was the only religion within the entire Roman empire that was exempt from the requirement to worship the Emperor
 - The Romans had discovered that the Jews were largely unrulable if they were prevented from worshipping according to their Law
 - So to keep the peace in a compromise, Rome made a rare exception for the Jewish religion
 - This was a delicate balance

- The Romans didn't want their generosity to become excuse for the Jews to disrupt the peace or mock Roman rule
- The Jews didn't want zealots or troublemakers to antagonize the Roman authorities and risk losing their special status
 - Furthermore, other religions were jealous of the Jews and would have loved to end their dispensation out of spite
 - Finally, there is the spiritual dimension of the Enemy warring against God's people in any way he can
- So against this backdrop, here's Paul and Silas preaching a new religion
 - Yet to untrained ears it seems to be another version of Judaism
 - And when it runs into conflict with the fortuneteller's income, they strike back at all Jews
 - This was a time of growing Jewish persecution
 - The Emperor Claudius had recent expelled all Jews from Rome and set the stage for greater anti Semetism
 - Here the men claim that the Jews are using their special dispensation to disrupt Roman peace and teach unlawful things
 - Of course, this wasn't the true story, but it was believed and it had two immediate effects
 - First, it gave the Gentiles authorities permission to act upon their anti-Semitic bias and attack Paul and Silas
 - More importantly, it struck fear into the hearts of the Jewish leaders who then had reason to silence Paul and distance themselves from his teaching
 - Here we have the basis for the next several chapters of Jewish persecution
- The immediate effect of their accusations, however, was an uprising among the Gentiles

[Acts 16:22](#) 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.

[Acts 16:23](#) When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;

[Acts 16:24](#) and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- Each Roman colony city was ruled by a pair of magistrates or city leaders, and these leaders respond to the crowd's concerns and order an illegal punishment for Roman citizens
 - They order that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods
 - They were stripped of their outer clothing - essentially into the underwear of that day
 - The magistrates themselves take the lead in the stripping
 - This stripping was a shameful acts for Jews
 - In fact, Paul mentions being shamed in Phillipi in his first letter to the Thessalonians

[1Th. 2:2](#) but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

- Paul will head to Thessalonica after leaving Phillipi
- Even the magistrates themselves participated in the violence against Paul and Silas
 - The actual beating would have been done by what were the equivalents of police in the Roman system, called lictors
 - This is another Rodney King moment
 - I wonder if Silas is having second thoughts about accompanying Paul at this point?
 - They were struck with many blows
 - In Jewish law, the limit was 40 minus 1 (39)
 - Under Roman law, the limit was set by the judge, but in this case there was no judge...just mob violence

- So we're left to imagine how many blows Paul and Silas were subjected to
- After the beating, they are placed in prison under the guard of the jailor
 - This kind of treatment was a crime in itself, since Romans citizens were to receive due process before punishment
 - By beating Romans before a hearing or pronouncement of guilt, the city officials were committing a serious crime
 - We don't know why Paul and Silas don't reveal they are citizens before the beating
 - Or perhaps they never had a chance, though that seems unlikely given that Paul has opportunity to do so under similar circumstances in a later moment
 - Perhaps Paul wanted the leverage over the magistrates or felt he was ordained by God to receive this treatment
- The jailor was ordered to hold them securely
 - Under Roman law, if the jailor allowed an escape, he was subjected to the death penalty
 - To be sure they didn't escape, he placed them in the inner prison
 - This was a room deep within the prison that lacked windows and no light
 - The only air that made its way inside came when the door was opened
 - And then to top it all off, they were placed in stocks
 - Their feet were locked through holes in a large wood log, to prevent them from standing
 - Given their painful beating, this kind of forced positioning would have been agony

[Acts 16:25](#) But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;
[Acts 16:26](#) 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.

- The men endure this situation for a few hours, but then the Lord shakes things up, so to speak
 - Before we look at the earthquake, we can't help but marvel at how Paul and Silas are spending their time
 - They are praying and singing hymns
 - Obviously, both the prayers and singing is done out loud
 - Interestingly, their position in the inner room has placed them in the perfect place to reach all the residents of the prison
 - Being in the center of the prison, the inner room was the perfect place to be heard throughout the building
 - These were not the kinds of sounds the other prisoners would have expected to hear coming from this place
 - In fact, when Paul and Silas were led into this room, the other prisoners must have been thinking that these guys were going to be miserable
 - Instead, they're holding a church service
 - Soon, what these men have heard changes the life of one man
 - We should remember that Paul is in Phillipi
 - And his letter sent back to this city is built on a theme of being content under any circumstances, finding joy under any circumstances, and keep looking to your eternal reward
- A strong and sudden earthquake strikes the prison
 - By the nature of the circumstances and what follows, it's obvious that this event is supernatural in origin and purpose
 - God is working to release Paul and Silas so that He might accomplish a greater work through the experience
 - But the event itself is entirely natural
 - A strong earthquake shakes the entire structure

- It forces open all the doors by breaking their jams and hinges likely
- Even the chains that held the prisoners to their cell walls were set loose from the walls
 - They likely remained locked around their wrists, though that's unclear from the text
- And under any other circumstances, every prisoner would have run out of the prison while they had the chance
 - Unless of course they perceive the source of the earthquake as supernatural and attribute it to the worship of Paul and Silas
 - In which case, the prisoners would have been attracted to Paul and Silas to understand what kind of power they had to accomplish such wonders

[Acts 16:27](#) 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.

[Acts 16:28](#) But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"

[Acts 16:29](#) And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,

[Acts 16:30](#) and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

- At the earthquake, the jailer awoke
 - We can note immediately that he wasn't hearing the worship that Paul and Silas were conducting for the benefit of the rest of the jail
 - He's heard nothing until the earthquake
 - Now as he surveys the damage and learns that all prisoners were set free by the earthquake
 - The jailer immediately understood what this meant
 - The penalty for losing even one prisoner was the death penalty, much less the entire jail
 - Romans had a very black and white view of such things
 - So the jailer decides that a self-inflicted wound would be better than waiting for the inevitable sentence from his superiors

- Paul somehow learns of the man's predicament, probably anticipating what he might conclude
 - But Paul knew something that the jailor didn't know
 - The cells were empty, but the prisoners hadn't moved outside the prison
 - They have moved deeper into the prison to join Paul and Silas
 - Having been a captive audience to Paul and Silas' singing and prayer, they had been converted to the Gospel
 - And now they were drawn to these men
 - What a powerful example of Romans 8:28
 - God turning all things to good for those who love Him
- Paul calls the man over, and he arrives to see an astonishing sight
 - Can you imagine the expression on his face when he turned on the lamps and took in the scene?
 - He has been the jailor for each of these men and we can trust he was stern with each of them
 - And now they have been set free en masse in a way that would have made it difficult for anyone to find them and recapture them
 - And instead of fleeing, they are sitting in and around Paul and Silas's cell
 - Remember, that Romans didn't incarcerate criminals for very long
 - There was no long term prison population
 - If you were in prison, it was just a waiting period, usually until you were sentenced to death
 - So remaining in jail was essentially suicide
 - What does the jailor think when he comes upon this scene?
 - Stunned isn't strong enough

- In fact, the scene is so striking and unexpected, that he immediately asks Paul and Silas the most important question anyone can ask
 - How can I be saved?
- I think the thing that motivated the jailor to ask this question was love in a way
 - Consider that had Paul and Silas left the prison, then the rest of the prisoners would have certainly followed
 - And as the jailor looks upon this scene, he must have immediately recognized that the prison population was following Paul and Silas
 - Furthermore, Paul himself was the one who called out to the jailor and called him by saying here “we” are
- And yet Paul and Silas remained, and with them all the prisoners
 - This is a kind of love in action as far as the jailor is concerned
 - He realizes that not only has Paul and Silas determined to remain in the prison and thereby save the jailor’s life
 - Secondly, they called out to him and prevented him from committing suicide when they didn’t have to intervene
- This is the love that the jailor experienced
 - And as he contemplates it all in a moment, the Spirit moves him to ask the fundamental question every man should ask
 - How can I be saved?
 - We’re not sure if he meant it in the full soteriological sense
 - Did he mean how can I be saved from the judgment for my sins? Perhaps he heard some of the praying and singing and felt this was the time to ask
 - Or did he mean how can I be saved from the punishment of my superiors? Perhaps he still wondered if some prisoners had escaped

- Or maybe he meant how can I be saved from your power to bring about earthquakes.
- Regardless of what he thought he was asking, Paul gives him the one right answer

[Acts 16:31](#) They said, " Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

[Acts 16:32](#) And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.

[Acts 16:33](#) And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

[Acts 16:34](#) And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

- First, Paul gives the jailor the Gospel accounts in simple terms
 - But he adds that both the jailor and his household would be saved
 - What is Paul implying? Will one man's salvation save everyone in his family?
 - We know this isn't the general testimony of Scripture, so the meaning must be elsewhere in this content
 - The likely explanation is that Paul had foreknowledge or other insight to conclude that God intended to work through this man and the rest of his family
 - Paul was essentially speaking prophetically to this man concerning God's plans for him and his family
 - We can't give equal assurances to other people concerning their family unless we have received a revelation from the Lord concerning His plans
- Importantly, Paul and Silas speak the word of God to the jailor in conjunction with the call to believe
 - Just as Paul himself wrote later that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ
 - The man believes in this Gospel, and as a result he changes from being their jailor to their nurse
 - He washes their wounds

- And they baptize the jailor
- Can you imagine the emotions in that night?
 - A man who was inflicting their wounds is changed by the words of the Gospel into a man who feels compassion for those same wounds and treats them
 - Can you imagine what it must have been like to receive the Gospel from the man you were persecuting just a few hours earlier?
 - And isn't the love of God amazingly powerful in the way it changes hearts and leads men to a new walk?
- The jailor takes Paul and Silas to his own house, which was probably located on the prison grounds
 - He feeds them, and they rejoiced together, both the jailor and the rest of his household

[Acts 16:35](#) ¶ Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men."

[Acts 16:36](#) And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace."

[Acts 16:37](#) But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."

[Acts 16:38](#) The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,

[Acts 16:39](#) and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.

[Acts 16:40](#) They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

- At this point, we are forced to conclude that after this night of rejoicing, Paul, Silas and the rest of the prisoners return to their cells
 - Despite the earthquake damaging the prison, they voluntarily return to their places
 - This means that likely some of the other prisoners were led to the deaths
 - Were these new believers? In at some if not all cases, the answer would be yes

- And yet God asked them to remain in prison and go to their deaths so that the jailor could be brought to the point of his own salvation
- Just as Paul himself later, Christians were required in the early church to go to their death for the sake of the spread of the Gospel
 - We may be asked to do the same to the glory of God
- The next morning, the leaders determine to let Paul and Silas free
 - The magistrates send policemen, lictors, to set them free
 - These are the same kind of men that beat Paul in the first place
 - When the jailor tells Paul he is free, Paul drops the surprising news that he's a Roman citizen
 - And indignantly, he asks that after a beating and imprisonment, they just expect him to leave quietly
 - Paul says let them come and get me out
 - Paul was quite bold, but he was very much within his rights
 - A crime had been committed against him, and he was demanding justice
 - When the lictor or policeman relayed this news to the magistrates, they realize how much trouble they are in
 - Now the situation is completely reversed
 - They ask Paul for forgiveness and mercy
 - And they ask Paul to leave the city so that the news will not spread about their actions
 - Paul doesn't seem interested in leaving too quickly, so he visits Lydia again before moving on
- We said last week that Luke uses this chapter to link Lydia, the slave girl and the Roman jailor
 - Look at the spectrum represented here

- A Jewish woman business owner dealing in the richest fabric in the Empire
 - A woman at the very top of the economic ladder
- And a slave girl possessed by a demon and exploited by unscrupulous men
 - The absolute lowest station in Roman society - a slave woman
- And finally, a representative of the Roman state
 - The decidedly Greek middle class of the society
- Paul has entered Europe for the first time and has influenced all levels of society as Luke reflects in the narrative
 - And along the way, Paul has sown the seeds for Jewish dissent that will become a continual problem for his ministry