

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Unfettered in Philippi

Acts 16:11-40

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 16, verse 11. And as we do that, this is a good place to review the main battle cry of the book of Acts. Everything in this book derives from a statement that Jesus gave his disciples all the way back in Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." We've seen this prophecy of Jesus fulfilled in the book of Acts already. And today's passage is going to take us *farther* into that mission and *closer* to the end of the earth as the gospel comes to Europe for the first time.

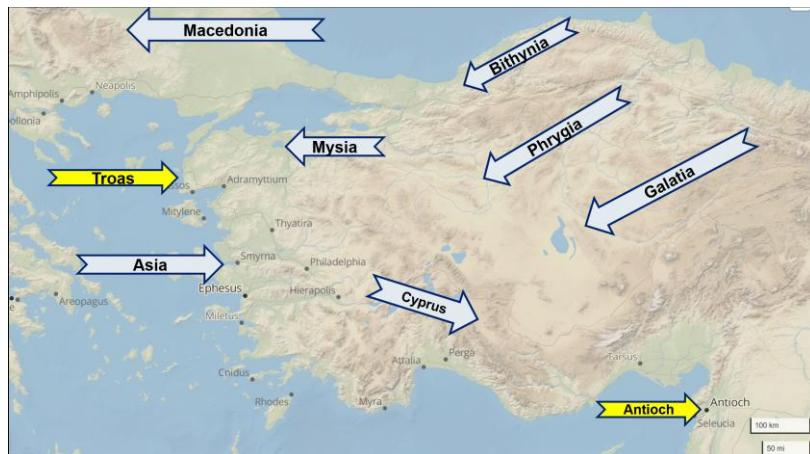
By the way, that word for "witnesses" in Acts 1:8 is the Greek *μάρτυς*, which we derive our English word "martyr" from. All Christians are called to be *μάρτυς*, that is "witnesses" for Christ Jesus. But some "witnesses" for Jesus actually become martyrs—they die for their faith. We've seen that twice already in the book of Acts with Stephen and James. And Paul has almost become a martyr for Christ too, several times. We're going to see Paul escape death *again* in today's passage. This guy just keeps dodging death.

Now in today's passage, Paul and Silas (Paul's new travel companion) are going to experience all the joys and sorrows of two people who are committed to Christ's mission. We're going to see the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, all in one passage. And this is all part and parcel of advancing Christ's mission. I'll show you in the text four things that advancing Christ's mission involves.

But first, a quick review. Last week, we saw the Apostle Paul travel throughout Phrygia and Galatia preaching the gospel, encouraging the churches, and even recruiting new helpers like Timothy. And although Paul ends up in Philippi in today's passage, that wasn't his original intent. If you remember from last week, he originally planned to go to Asia.

Look at Acts 16:6.

⁶And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.



Paul and Silas at the beginning of the Second Missionary Journey¹

¹ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), October 16, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

Look at the map above detailing their travels. Paul, Silas, and Timothy wanted to go southwest to preach the gospel in Asia, but the Holy Spirit says, “**No, we’re not doing that! Not yet anyway!**”

So after the Spirit puts the brakes on that excursion, they try another destination. Look at **verse 7**.

⁷ *And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.*

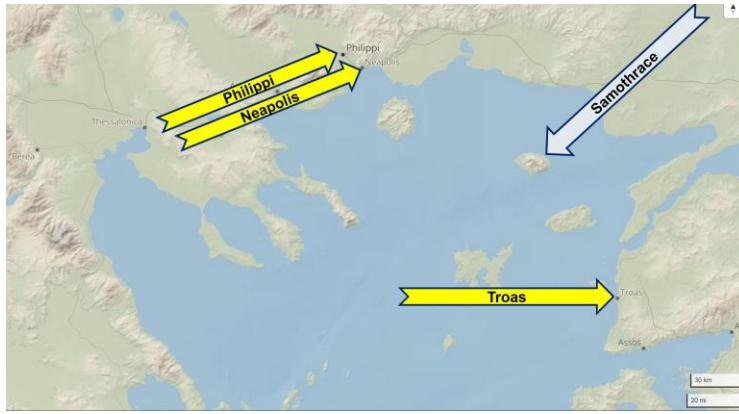
The Spirit intervenes again and doesn’t allow them to go northeast to Bithynia. So they can’t go south to Asia. They can’t go north to Bithynia. Where does the Lord want them to go?

Well according to **verse 9**, Paul has this vision of a “man of Macedonia” who urges him, “come over to Macedonia and help us.” After that Paul and his entourage decide, “**This is it! This is what God wants.**” And they travel west to a whole new continent, to Macedonia, to preach the gospel on European soil.

And so, picking up from where we left off last week, **verse 11** says,

¹¹ *So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city² of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.*

Now look at the map below to track this voyage. Let’s just zoom in on the area where Paul and his friends are travelling.



Paul and Silas (and Timothy and Luke) Travel to Philippi³

They travel from Troas (that’s where Paul had the vision of a Macedonian man) to Samothrace. Samothrace is an island off the coast of Macedonia right in the middle of the Aegean Sea. From there they go to the port city of Neapolis. Neapolis was about one hundred and twenty nautical miles northwest from Troas. And Philippi was only about ten miles north of Neapolis. So this journey only took a few days. And when they got to Philippi, according to **verse 12**, they stayed for “some days.”⁴

Notice also in **verse 11**, the pronoun is not “they” but “we.” The “we” indicates that Luke was with them for this journey. That’s why these travel details are so meticulous.⁵ This “we” language includes Paul, Silas, Timothy, and also Luke.

Additionally notice that Philippi, according to **verse 12**, was a “leading city” and a “Roman colony.” That’s really important. Log that away because we’ll come back to that later.

Now just a little bit about Philippi.⁶ Philippi was a pagan and wealthy city.⁷ It was a famous city, but it wasn’t a large metropolis like Rome or Antioch.⁸ The population of the city was only about 10,000.⁹ And it

² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 679: “Philippi was neither the capital of Macedonia nor of the district to which it belonged, this cannot be the meaning here. Since the term can denote not only sequence or order, but also rank and dignity, it is best understood as reflecting the civic pride of the citizens of Philippi, who regarded their city as the ‘leading’ city of the region, as the ‘first,’ ‘foremost,’ or ‘most honored’ city... Despite the fact that Paul had been preaching in other Roman colonies as well (Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium), this is the only occurrence of the term κολονία in the New Testament.”

³ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), October 16, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 672: “Paul’s mission in Philippi probably took place from August to October in AD 49.”

⁵ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 443: “We find specific descriptions of the time taken and the places passed through; this is understandable since the author himself participated in this trip.”

didn't have a significant Jewish population like a lot of the other cities that Paul had visited. So Paul can't go to the local synagogue like he usually does. He's got to try another approach.

Later in life Paul would write a letter to the church in Philippi which is our book of **Philippians**. Paul's tone in that book, unlike some of his other books, is pastoral and gentle and loving.¹⁰ And there are very few OT references in that book, especially compared with books like Romans and Galatians. The reason for that is because there are very few, if any, Jews in Philippi. And the church was made up of primarily Gentiles.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit told Paul, "**I want you in Macedonia... I want you across the Aegean Sea, away from your comfort zone, in a whole new continent full of Gentile heathens who have never heard about Jesus.**"

Go ahead and write this down as #1 in your notes. What does the advancing of Christ's mission involve? Well, first of all...

Advancing Christ's mission means:

1) **eagerly yielding** to Spiritual prompting (Acts 16:11-15)

The Holy Spirit says, "Get thee to Macedonia." Paul and Silas (and Timothy) say, "Sir, yes Sir," and they get to Macedonia. They are ready and willing to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

You might say, "God hasn't called me to Macedonia, Pastor Tony." No, probably not. But he has called you and all of us to make disciples. And advancing Christ's mission involves a willing and eager desire to obey the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives.

Why does God want Paul and Silas in Macedonia? Why does God want them in Philippi? What's this spiritual prompting all about? Let's find out in **verse 13**.

¹³ *And on the Sabbath day¹¹ we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.*

So there's no synagogue in Philippi. There's no viable Jewish presence. According to Jewish tradition, you would need ten Jewish men to establish a synagogue.¹² And whenever there weren't enough Jewish men to establish a synagogue, the population of Jewish adherents would go outside the gates of the city to pray. Paul knows this, and so he goes outside the city by the riverside and he meets up with a group of women.¹³

⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 533: "Besides observing the imperial cult, the city was home to the worship of many gods."

⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 533: "The area was rich with copper, silver, and gold deposits and was part of a fertile plain, tucked as it was against the hills of the area. So it was a wealthy city. The Roman influence was strong here because of Philippi's status as a Roman colony, which made it legally like a Roman city." Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 679: "Philippi's wealth, based on the provision of wood for shipbuilding and on gold and silver mines, was proverbial... In 42 BC, when Philippi was still a small settlement, the famous battle in which Mark Antony and Octavian (Augustus) defeated Brutus and Cassius, the murderers of Julius Caesar, took place in the vicinity. Mark Antony founded a colony in 42 BC with the name *Colonia Victrix Philippensis*. After the battle of Actium in 31 BC, in which Augustus won a decisive victory over Mark Antony, Augustus refounded Philippi in 27 BC as a new colony with the name *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis*. Philippi was granted the *ius Italicum*, resulting in tax exemption of the land which the citizens owned. Two temples on the forum were dedicated to the worship of the emperor; several inscriptions attest priests that were responsible for the cult in which Augustus was honored. The evidence of the inscriptions suggests that Latin was widely used in the city. Besides Thracian deities, only Greco-Roman cults are attested for the first century AD, a fact that allows the conclusion that Philippi had "a religious identity influenced primarily by Roman religion in which the worship of the emperor and his deified ancestors or predecessors was central, besides the traditional Greco-Roman pantheon."

⁸ See the sub-section entitled "In Depth: Philippi" in Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Expanded Digital Edition, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 679.

⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Expanded Digital Edition, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 679.

¹⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 349: "Of all Paul's churches, the Philippians' generosity stood out. They continued to send him support in his missionary endeavors elsewhere (Phil 4:15-18; cf. 2 Cor 11:8). One is tempted to see Lydia as a principal contributor."

¹¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 346: "Paul and his companions were in this city tarrying certain days (v. 12c). The Jewish community in Philippi was too small to maintain a synagogue. Hence, Paul had no specific place to go in order to preach and had to wait until the Sabbath day to find a Jewish prayer meeting."

¹² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 348n20: "At least ten males were required to form a synagogue. Since only women are mentioned in the gathering outside Philippi, there were likely not sufficient Jewish males to constitute a synagogue there."

¹³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 534: "That only women are mentioned here may suggest that a small Jewish community was present and leads also to the suggestion that this locale may not have been a synagogue."

So not only were there not enough Jewish men for a synagogue, **verse 13** seems to imply that there weren't any Jewish men at all.¹⁴ There seemingly wasn't even one "God-fearing" man in the whole city. And so God directs Paul's attention to the God-fearing women of the city.¹⁵

And one woman in particular becomes the single most important convert in Philippi. Look at **verse 14**.

¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple¹⁶ goods,¹⁷ who was a worshiper of God.¹⁸ The Lord opened her heart¹⁹ to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

So get this! There was a Macedonian man in Paul's vision who begged him to come to Macedonia. But the first person to receive the message wasn't a man, it was a woman.²⁰

This woman, Lydia, becomes the first European Christian. How awesome is that! And she became extremely strategic in the spreading of the gospel throughout Philippi and the planting of the Philippian Church. **Can God use women to play a significant role in establishing the church? You better believe he can! And she's not the first or the last person in Acts to play a strategic role in the church.**

There's an ancient Jewish prayer called the *Birkot HaShachar* ("Blessings of the Morning") that goes like this: "Thank you, God, I'm not a Gentile. Thank you, God, I'm not a woman. Thank you, God, I'm not a slave." With more than a little bit of irony here, Luke presents to us the first convert in Philippi as both a Gentile and a woman. And Jesus's mission (as is shown here) is not restricted to men, and it's not restricted to Jews either.

And notice what it says about Lydia in **verse 14**. She was a "worshiper of God." In other words, she was also a Gentile "God-fearer," not unlike Cornelius and his household (see **Acts 10**).²¹

Also Lydia was a "seller of purple goods." Purple was the color of royalty in that day. Purple coloring was not in great supply. It was very hard to come by. Remember this is before the days of synthetic dyes and coloring. Because purple was extremely rare and expensive, a seller of purple goods, like Lydia, would have been well off. And that's borne out by the fact that she owns her own home and uses it for hospitality.

So Lydia was a woman. She was well off. She was a Gentile. But she was also a God-fearer. She was a "worshiper of God." Not a Christian! Not yet! Remember, we discussed this with Cornelius. "God-fearing" is not the same as "Christ-believing."

But as Paul explains the gospel, "the Lord opened her heart." Do you see that? Salvation is from the Lord.²² "The Lord opened her heart," and she got saved. We are not born saved. We are not saved because our

¹⁴ JOHN CALVIN: "I think that Luke made no mention of men, because either they were unwilling to listen, or they did not benefit from what they heard." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 228.

¹⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 50: "She's not a Jew; otherwise Luke would have identified her as one. She's a religious Gentile at the river for prayer because she understands and acknowledges Yahweh as the one true and living God."

¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 680: "The purple dye was extracted from the purple fish (πορφύρα, 'purple-fish,' Lat. *Murex trunculus*, *Purpura haemastoma*). The purple industry had a long history in the cities of the Phoenician coast, particularly Tyre, but played an important role in Lydia and Phrygia in Asia Minor as well. Contrary to the opinion of many, 'the use of purple was not restricted to the wealthy, for the majority of purple dyes was manufactured and readily accessible, in different grades of quality and color variation,' although colorfast purple extracted from the *Murex* was still very expensive. Purple could also be derived from *rubia*, the madder plant, the so-called 'Turkey red' which was used in Asia Minor. If the imperial monopoly on purple, which is attested for the time of Nero, goes back to Claudius, Lydia may have been a member of the imperial household (not all whom resided in Rome); an inscription from Miletus documents members of the imperial household (the *familia Caesaris*) who appear to have been of freed status as involved in the purple trade. As a dealer in purple products (garments, blankets, carpets), Lydia would have been well-to-do."

¹⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 349: "Lydia's business is not an incidental detail. It marks her as a person of means. Purple goods were expensive and often associated with royalty; thus the business was a lucrative one."

¹⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 534: "Lydia is also a pious woman (σεβομένη τὸν Θεόν, *sebomenē ton theon*). This phrase often describes former polytheists who become worshipers of the God of Israel, adopt monotheism, and attend the synagogue but do not keep the entire law."

¹⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 534: "God creates the initiative to faith from within."

²⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 680: "Her professional status as a merchant—evidently working on her own initiative and independently of a husband—suggests that she was widowed or divorced."

²¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 349: "Lydia was a 'worshiper of God' (16:14), one of those devout Gentiles like Cornelius who believed in God but had not become a full convert to Judaism. There was an extensive Jewish community at Thyatira, and she had perhaps first come to her faith in God there."

parents are grandparents are saved. We are not saved because we mustered up salvation on our own. This is the Lord's work. The Lord has to open up a person's heart. And what is explicit here with Lydia is implicit with every conversion in the Bible and throughout human history.

And verse 15 says,

¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household²³ as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.²⁴

Now this is a strong statement. She "prevailed upon us," meaning "she urged them strongly" to come stay at her house.²⁵ This word "prevailed upon" even has the idea of using force. We might say it like this, "She twisted their arms until they agreed to receive her hospitality."²⁶

"Okay, Okay, Lydia! We'll receive your hospitality. Quit twisting our arms."²⁷ I'll just tell you that sometimes European women are extremely aggressive with their hospitality. I know this from experience. My mother-in-law was never happy unless you were well fed and well taken care of in her house. So this is on brand for a European woman.

And not only was Lydia saved in this story, she immediately becomes the central figure of the Philippian church. Her whole household gets saved and baptized too. The church starts meeting at her house according to verse 40. She's immediately becomes a dynamo for Jesus, right after her salvation.

Now look with me to see what happens next. Look at verse 16.

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination²⁸ and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.²⁹

Uh-oh. Something tells me that a showdown with the Apostle Paul is about to take place here.

²² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 50: "No one can say they came to the Lord because of their intellect, spiritual sensitivity, or moral uprightness. Rather, as with Lydia, the Lord opens our hearts so we can repent and believe. The Scriptures abound with the saving, gracious work of God, who powerfully opens the eyes of the blind and softens the hearts of the dead (for example, Luke 24:45; Ephesians 1:18). Scripture is also clear that those who hear the gospel have a duty to respond (for example, Acts 2:38; 17:30–31; Romans 10:13), but they will not respond in faith unless the Lord first opens their heart. Lydia hears the gospel, and she responds."

²³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 350: "There is no evidence whatever that this included infants, and it cannot be used in support of infant baptism. Previous references to Cornelius's household indicate that those who were baptized both heard and believed the message (10:44; 11:4, 17). Throughout Acts baptism is based on personal faith and commitment, and there is no reason to see otherwise in the household baptisms." Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 50–1: "This does not mean that everybody in Lydia's house was baptized regardless of whether they had made any profession of faith in Christ. This verse, therefore, does not undermine the necessity of belief before baptism. Indeed, the Acts narrative sets out a clear pattern of the gospel preached and the gospel received by faith, followed by the obedience of baptism."

²⁴ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 448: "Acts often mentions the names of the hosts who opened their homes for missionaries to live in and/or to stay at for meals or meetings: Simon (9:43), Simon and Peter (10:23), Cornelius (10:48), Mary (12:12), Lydia (16:15), the Philippian jailer (16:34), Jason (17:5–7), Aquila and Priscilla (twice: 18:2–3, 26), Titius Justus (18:7), Philip (21:8), Mnason (21:16), and Publius (who was at first not a believer, 28:7)... Hosts clearly played an important role in the mission of the church in Acts, and they should do so today as well."

²⁵ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 444: "Were the team members reluctant to go there because it was a Gentile home? We cannot be sure, but it is unlikely that Paul would have had such hesitancy. Luke's interests in hosts is seen with the mention of hospitality in the homes of Lydia and the jailer (v. 34)."

²⁶ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 25.

²⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 681: "Perhaps the current accommodations of Paul and his friends were inadequate in her eyes, which would be particularly true if they stayed in a hostel for travelers."

²⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 682: "The Greek term *pythōn* (πύθων) term came to designate a 'spirit of divination,' and was then also used of ventriloquists who were believed to have such a spirit dwelling in their belly. The syntax of the Greek expression can be read in two ways: the slave girl had a spirit named Python, or she had a pythonic spirit, i.e., a spirit that produced oracles. The latter is certainly what has been happening: the girl was 'giving oracles' (μαντευομένη), perhaps speaking with her belly. She foretold the future or used her abilities to inform clients how to protect themselves from misfortune or how to harm their enemies—psychic gifts that attracted people who paid for her services and that consequently brought "great profit" (έργασία πολλή) for her owners."

²⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 351: "Greeks and Romans put great stock on augury and divination. No commander would set out on a major military campaign nor would an emperor make an important decree without first consulting an oracle to see how things might turn out. A slave girl with a clairvoyant gift was thus a veritable gold mine for her owners."

¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God,³⁰ who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days.

So this demonized girl cries out constantly, “These men are servants of the Most High God!”... “These men are servants of the Most High God!”... “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” Is that annoying?³¹ She did that, according to Luke, for many days.³²

Now is what she’s saying true? Yeah!³³ But I get the sense here that she’s trying (or maybe more appropriately the demon inside of her is trying) to distract people from Paul’s message by being a nuisance.³⁴

Just imagine how distracting it would be if every Sunday while I was preaching, someone kept standing up and yelling, “This man is a servant of the Most High God!” If someone kept doing that, I’d probably say, “Thank you for your enthusiasm, but your distracting people from hearing the Word of God. Zip it!”³⁵

Well Paul puts up with this for several days according to **verse 18**. But then, look at the middle of **verse 18**.

Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

Paul casts out this demonic spirit *in the name of Jesus Christ*. I think this is a really important principle to grasp. Paul doesn’t cast out by his own name. Paul doesn’t cast out a demon by the power of the Apostle Paul. It’s only by the power of Jesus Christ that victory over the demonic realm is granted.³⁶

And Paul’s action not only frees his ministry from a visible distraction, it also frees this young girl from demonic oppression.³⁷

Write this down as #2 in your notes. Advancing Christ’s mission means eagerly yielding to Spiritual prompting. It also means...

2) **boldly confronting** satanic opposition (Acts 16:16–24)

Now let me say this. I’m not so sure that we should directly address a demonic spirit like Paul does here. I think that the Spirit of God gave Paul a unique ability to drive out demons and to directly assault the enemy

³⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 683n797: “In the LXX, the term ‘Most High’ translates the divine title יְהָוָה which denotes ‘the powerful status of the God enthroned in Heaven’ (*TLOT*, 892); e.g. Num 24:16; Deut 32:8; 2 Sam 22:14; Pss 9:3; 21:8 (LXX 20:8); Isa 14:14.”

³¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 97: “The father of lies speaks the truth when it suits his purposes, disguising himself and his emissaries as angels of light (2 Cor. 11:13–14). Some of his most effective and diabolical work is done in the name of Jesus Christ. He often uses a little truth to ensnare people in a false system of religion.”

³² CHRYSOSTOM: “And why did the demon do this? Because he wanted to confound the order of things, to snatch away the apostles’ dignity and to persuade many to pay attention to him. If that had happened, they would have appeared trustworthy from then on and introduced their own designs. To prevent this and to forestall deceit, [Paul] silences them even though they speak the truth, so that no one should pay any attention to their lies but stop listening altogether to what they say.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 203.

³³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 351: “Like the demoniacs during Jesus’ ministry, the possessed girl was evidently able to see into the true nature of Paul’s preaching, particularly into the reality of the God he proclaimed (cf. Luke 4:34; Mark 1:24).”

³⁴ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 348: “Demons not only recognize who Yeshua is, they also recognize who His servants are. Hence, when the maid exclaimed, *These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim unto you the way of salvation*, it was clearly demonic recognition. Furthermore, demons also recognize the true way of salvation, namely, that salvation comes by faith in the substitutionary death of Yeshua the Messiah. Though demons know this, they cannot respond to it. That is why James wrote: *The demons also believe, and shudder* (Jas. 2:19).”

³⁵ KONRAD PELLIKAN: “[This girl] followed Paul and his companions and was shouting after them things that were true, but to a pernicious end. And people were paying a great deal of money to the masters for this girl, so that they might hear from her some future event or other or something pleasing, but in doing so they were severely distracting Paul and his companions. Moreover, it is the deceitful genius of Satan, that he is the father of lies, not only because he always speaks through manifest lies but because he also misuses the manifest truth to convince people of lies for the purpose of deceiving them, so that in the end, by the appearance of truth, he convinces people of falsehood.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 232.

³⁶ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 53: “Exorcisms in the New Testament primarily point to the power of God, not the one who performs the exorcism. The power to exorcise demons did not reside in Paul or any other apostle who performed such miracles. Power and authority over the spiritual forces of evil rests in Jesus Christ alone.”

³⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 53 overreads the situation concluding: “This girl not only received deliverance from the evil spirit, but she also came to saving knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ.”

(not unlike Jesus in the Gospels). But even if we don't directly speak to demons, we are not powerless to intercede for those who are demonized. We are called and equipped to engage in spiritual warfare.

And just for the record, there's no such thing as pacifism in the Christian life. When you became a Christian, you signed up to be on the battlelines. And here's the good news—you're on the winning team. And in confrontations with the enemy, we are not powerless. God has given us weapons of warfare.

For instance, we have “the shield of faith” (Eph 6:16). This is a defensive weapon which deflects the arrows of the evil one. To doubt is to give ground to the enemy. Fear is failure; faith is victory. And sometimes I've found it victorious to vocalize my faith when confronting the enemy. “I believe in the Name of Jesus Christ.” “Satan you are a liar. You are a deceiver.” “I claim victory in the Name of Jesus Christ.” If you need to say that out loud in a moment of spiritual attack, do it!

We also have “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17). In moments of attack, in moments of despair, where's your sword? Is it at your side? Is it on your tongue? Is it in your heart? Is it on your smart phone? Too many Christians, I'm afraid, are ignorant about God's Word and so they walk into spiritual battles without a weapon. Instead, keep the Word of God at your ready so that you can attack the spiritual forces of darkness.

We also have the weapon of prayer. This is both an offensive and a defensive weapon. The armies of heaven are mobilized by the prayers of God's people. When attacks of the enemy come, pray. When Satan attacks your family, get on your knees. When Satan takes aim at our church, intercede! Pray! Plead! Petition! Supplicate! Intercede!

I think one of the biggest mistakes we can make when we read the Bible is thinking, “O Paul was awesome! He's just awesome! I could never do what he does.” Yes, maybe we don't have phenomenal apostolic powers, but we are not powerless as Christians. The same Holy Spirit that was inside of Paul two thousand years ago is inside of you right now. Is the Holy Spirit any less powerful? Is prayer any less powerful today than it was back then?

Now watch what happens next with this little girl. Because you might've thought, “O wow, her owners are going to be happy when they hear what happened!” But look at this in **verse 19**.

¹⁹ *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone,*

The Greek word for “gone” here is ἐξέρχομαι (*exerchomai*). It's the same Greek word used previously for the evil spirit going out of the girl. The demon is gone! But all these guys care about is that their profit is gone!³⁸

And so,

they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

“Who cares about the girl!³⁹ All we care about is the gain!”⁴⁰

²⁰ *And when they had brought them to the magistrates,⁴¹ they said, “These men are Jews*

Now stop right there.⁴² This is that moment where you might want to say, “**So what? What does their “Jewishness” have to do with anything?**”⁴³ The reason it's significant here is because the Roman Empire was rife with antisemitism.⁴⁴ And that is not a rare thing. This is clearly seen before this in the Persian and

³⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 351: “He used the same verb (*exēlthen*) for the demon's coming out in v. 18 as for the money's going in v. 19.”

³⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 537: “Money is more important to them than salvation (Luke 12:21; 18:18–30; Mark 5:16–17; Acts 19:24–29), not to mention the woman's welfare and dignity.”

⁴⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 351: “The scene was reminiscent of the Gerasene pigs incident (Mark 5:16–17). The profit motive was a frequent obstacle to the gospel in *Acts*.”

⁴¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 685: “The following scene may have taken place on the northwest side of the agora, the probable site of the *bema* or *rostrum*, the raised podium where hearings and trials took place.”

⁴² More woodenly according to word order they said, “These men stirring up our city... Jews, they are” (Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐκταράσσουσιν ἡμῶν τὴν πόλιν, Ιουδαῖοι ὑπάρχοντες).

⁴³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 686: “The reference to ‘these men’ (οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι) has a derogatory connotation, as has their description as ‘Jews’ (Ιουδαῖοι)—being Jewish, they can be expected to cause trouble. Anti-Jewish bigotry can be found among both Greeks and Romans, in views and actions of government officials and as popular prejudice.”

⁴⁴ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 350: “The real issue was loss of income, but the given issue was nationalism and religion. At that time, Judaism was a *religio licita*, a legal religion, but Jews were not allowed to make proselytes of Roman citizens. Paul and Silas

Babylonian Empires (see **Esther** and **Daniel** for more on that). And it's clearly seen after this during the last twenty centuries as a latent antisemitism has been normative in Gentile society. It's amazing to me in the book of **Acts** how Jews persecute Gentiles when they're in the majority, and Gentiles persecute Jews when they're in the majority.

In fact, it says here that *only* Paul and Silas were seized and dragged off. That's interesting. Timothy and Luke weren't dragged off. Why not? It's probably because they weren't full-blooded Jews.⁴⁵

So at least part of what's going on here is racial prejudice. And we've seen Paul and the other apostles work like crazy to eliminate racial prejudice and bias in the churches, because the blood of Jesus can break down racial prejudice. But the rest of the world doesn't really care about that.

So, the owners of this slave girl shout...

"These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city.²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."

What customs? What are they talking about? All Paul did was cast out a demon. That's what they're angry about. All Paul did was get in the way of them exploiting this little girl for profit. Paul disrupted the economics of the city, and God forbid that we would let anything disrupt our economic balance.⁴⁶

There's an old cautionary proverb that goes like this: "Be careful when you get between people and their idols, because when you do, they get violent."⁴⁷ That's what's happening here. Paul got between these men and their idol of money and profit, and they get violent. **Let me just say, for the record, that slavish materialism and consumerism didn't start in America; we've just perfected it. Even twenty centuries ago people were bowing down to the gods of economics.**⁴⁸

Look at **verse 22**.

²² *The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them [Paul and Silas] and gave orders to beat them with rods.*

So just to be clear, there's no real due diligence here. There's no due process. There's a semblance of due process with magistrates and city officials ("rulers" in **verse 19**). But this is more like a kangaroo court than a legitimate judicial process. The leaders of the city even get in on this violence! Look at **verse 22**: "the magistrates tore the garments off them!"

Why? Because of what? Because Paul, a Jew, was preaching the gospel! That's why. Because Paul, a Jew, freed a slave girl from demonization! That's what he's guilty of.

Look at **verse 23**. This gets worse.

²³ *And when they had inflicted many blows⁴⁹ upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.*

Now let's just think about this for a moment. Paul and Silas have been publicly humiliated by these people. They have had their clothes stripped off of them. Their nakedness would have been exposed to the crowds, which was extremely humiliating for Jewish people. Immodesty was very shameful for Jews. And to add injury to insult, they endured a public caning as "many blows" were inflicted on them.

were charged with attempting to convert Roman citizens. By contrasting "being Jewish" with "being Romans," their accusers tried to make their charges sound patriotic in order to hide the real issue: their love of money."

⁴⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 538: "There is no mention of Timothy or Luke. They may well have been spared because they were Gentiles or because they were not in as visible a role."

⁴⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 352: "The greed of the slave girl's owners was in marked contrast to the generosity of Lydia, who shared her house with the missionaries and the Philippian Christians."

⁴⁷ I'm not sure where this expression originated. But I first encountered it in Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011).

⁴⁸ RUDOLF GWALTHER: "Covetousness therefore was the chief cause of this commotion, which did not only dazzle their eyes so that they could not see the truth but also so set them on fire that they could not but with deadly hatred persecute the apostles. This is a notable example to teach us what a mischievous evil covetousness can be." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 233.

⁴⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 687: "The beating was severe; v. 23a speaks of 'many blows' (πολλάς πληγάς, translated as 'severely beaten'), and v. 33 speaks of 'wounds' (τῶν πληγῶν) that needed to be cleaned... Severe beatings with rods was a bloody affair, as the case of Gaius Servilius illustrates, who was severely beaten until finally one of the lictors "took the butt end of his stick, and began to strike the poor man violently across the eyes, so that he fell helpless to the ground, his faces and eyes streaming with blood. Even then his assailants continued to rain blows on his prostrate body."

Some of you might remember way back in 1994, there was a kid named Michael Fay who was caned in Singapore for vandalism. President Bill Clinton got his sentence reduced from six blows to four blows, which was a big deal. The president of the United States interceded for an American abroad.

But look at this. Nobody interceded for Paul and Silas here. They endured “many blows,” until their bodies were bloodied and covered with welts, scars, and bruises. Paul still had the scars on his body from his stoning in Lystra. Paul said even before this incident in **Galatians 6:17** that he bore the scars on his body from his service to Jesus. Here comes some more scars. Here comes some more pain endured for the sake of the gospel.

Look at **verse 24**.

²⁴ Having received this order [that's the jailer receiving orders from the magistrates in verse 23], he put them into the inner prison⁵⁰ and fastened their feet⁵¹ in the stocks.⁵²

The word here for “stocks” is the Greek ξύλον (*xylon*) for wood or tree.⁵³ If you remember, that was the word used to describe the cross or “tree” that Jesus was crucified on (see **Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29**). But in this case, Paul’s feet (possibly hands too) were placed inside of holes in the wood and then fastened with chains. In this way Paul once again was shown “how much he must suffer for the sake of [Jesus’s] name” (**Acts 9:16**).⁵⁴

Stocks, by the way, were used to detain prisoners. But they were also used as a form of torture.⁵⁵ R. Kent Hughes writes this, “The officials who punished Paul and Silas were called *lictors* in Latin. This is where the expression ‘getting your licks’ came from. The evangelists’ backs were reduced to a sticky, swollen mass of lacerated skin and dried blood. The jailer perhaps went a step further than necessary, brutally putting them in the stocks. They could not lie down without tearing up their backs even worse.”⁵⁶

Another commentator writes this, “The stocks normally caused extreme discomfort as the prisoner had to sleep either in a sitting position or lying down on the floor. Changing positions to avoid cramping was nearly impossible.”⁵⁷

Why on earth would Paul and Silas submit themselves to this? Why on earth didn’t they stay back in Antioch where things were safe and predictable? The church was healthy and growing. Maybe they made a mistake. Maybe God’s punishing them for disobedience. Maybe they are outside of the will of God. Yeah,

⁵⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 689: “They prayed and sang *sotto voce*, in the stale air and the stench of the maximum security cell, in the middle of the night, in complete darkness... There is some evidence from ancient literature that a jailer took prisoners from other rooms in the prison, or from the prison yard, and crammed them into the most secure part of the prison overnight.”

⁵¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 352: “This treatment was both unnecessary and cruel. The stocks were made from a piece of wood, such as a cross or a log or a large piece of timber, some of which had five holes: two for the wrists, two for the ankles, and one for the neck. Some had only two holes for the feet, which appears to be the case here. Paul’s and Silas’ feet were shackled after being stretched wide apart. All this shows that they underwent a very painful enclosure in the stocks and spent a very uncomfortable night, while their backs were still sore from being beaten with rods.”

⁵² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 688: “Eighteen years earlier, Paul himself had thrown followers of Jesus into prison (8:3). Now he sits in jail himself.”

⁵³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 539: “The first meaning of the term τὸ ξύλον (*to xylon*) is ‘wood’ (Herodotus, *Hist.* 9.37). The stocks are made of wood and designed to prevent escape. They can be tight and painful, with holes to push the legs apart.”

⁵⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 691n865: “The cruelty of jailers is attested by Philo: ‘Everyone knows well how jailers are filled with inhumanity and savagery. For by nature they are unmerciful, and by practice they are trained daily toward fierceness, as to become wild beasts. They see, say, and do nothing good, not even by change, but instead the most violent and cruel things ... Jailers, therefore, spend time with robbers, thieves, burglars, the wanton, the violent, corrupters, murderers, adulterers, and the sacrilegious. From each of these they draw and collect depravity, producing from that diverse blend a single mixture of thoroughly abominable evil’ (Joseph 81, 84).”

⁵⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ac 16:24.

⁵⁶ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 25.

⁵⁷ Brian Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, vol. 3, BAFCS, 123–29. Quoted in Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 445.

that's it. Surely God would never have led them to this. Or maybe, just maybe, the love of God, and the love of the gospel, propelled them into hostile territory to preach the saving message of Jesus Christ to lost people.⁵⁸

Now I know a lot of people will fixate on what Paul did with the little girl who was demonized. And they will put together a theology of spiritual warfare with that episode. And I'm not against that necessarily. But can I just make an obvious statement. Satan's work wasn't completed once the demon was cast out of that little girl! Is everyone with me? In fact, it's almost as if Satan was just getting started when that demon was cast out.

And instead of being "delivered" from the powers of darkness, Paul and Silas were delivered over to evil men who subsequently stripped, whipped, and imprisoned them. Does that mean that we shouldn't courageously confront Satanic forces in this world? I don't think so. Does that mean that God doesn't have the power to rescue us in a time of suffering? Absolutely not. Does that mean instead that God uses suffering and even the opposition of the enemy for his greater purposes? He does.

Maybe instead of asking, "**Why did God allow that?**" we should ask instead, "**What great thing is God going to do through this suffering?**" **That's the question we should be asking in our own lives when we face hardship.**⁵⁹

Now, watch this!

²⁵ About midnight⁶⁰ Paul and Silas were praying

They probably couldn't sleep because of those stocks. It was too painful. So why not pray?

And what do you think they were praying? "**O God, strike them down! Unleash your righteous indignation on these heathens, Lord!**" Is that what they were praying? Or maybe they were lamenting, "**O God, why did you lead us here? Why did we listen to the Holy Spirit? We could have been in Bithynia right now! Why didn't we stay in Antioch?**" Is that what they were doing? I doubt it.

And look what else they were doing.

²⁵ ... Paul and Silas were praying and singing⁶¹ hymns to God,

What! These guys are nuts! Does this really happen? Do people really do this?⁶²

How many of you see what Paul and Silas do here and feel really convicted? I do. And maybe you even think to yourself, "I complain too much." "In times when I should be praising God, I grumble and I gripe and I bellyache. And if Paul and Silas can praise God in Acts 16, then I can praise him too when I'm going through a disappointment or a trial."

Look at this too in **verse 25**. Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. What were the other prisoners doing?

*and the prisoners were listening to them*⁶³

⁵⁸ Paul discusses his treatment in 1 Thessalonians 2:2: "But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict." In 2 Corinthians 11:25, Paul wrote, "Three times I was beaten with rods." This was probably the first of those three times.

⁵⁹ CHRYSOSTOM: "Who is equal to these souls? After being whipped they received numerous blows and underwent insults and extreme dangers. While fastened in stocks in the innermost cell, they stayed awake not wanting to fall asleep. Do you see how great the affliction of the righteous is? We sleep in soft beds without any fear throughout the night. Maybe they stayed awake because they were in this state. The tyrant sleep did not catch them, pain did not bend them, fear did not make them dispirited, but these things spurred them on even more." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 206.

⁶⁰ AMMONIUS: "They followed the psalmist, who says, 'At midnight I will rise to confess to you (Ps 119:62).'" Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 206.

⁶¹ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 449: "Singing helps us focus on the glorious eternal realities that may be clouded by the gloomy temporary realities. It helps us especially because, when we cannot produce words of our own, we can use words of others."

⁶² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 355: "In Acts, Christians are always full of hope. Peter slept peacefully the night before his trial (12:6); Paul and Silas sang."

⁶³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 352: "The other prisoners were listening to them, because this was not the usual kind of sound one would expect to hear from the inner prison. It was these actions of Paul and Silas that kept the others from taking the opportunity to escape later on."

I'm sure they were like, "These guys are nuts!" Or maybe they were like this: "Whatever they have... Whatever they've got... I want that!" Because with shackled feet and bleeding backs and uncomfortably unable to sleep, they're singing praises to God.⁶⁴ If only we were all as crazy as these guys.⁶⁵

Write this down #3 in your notes. Advancing Christ's mission means thirdly...

3) **gladly absorbing** blows for the gospel (Acts 16:25-34)

Listen here me on this. Love for Christ and for lost people gladly absorbs blows for the gospel! "But Pastor Tony, my friends will reject me if I talk about my faith openly." Love gladly absorbs blows for the gospel. "But Pastor Tony my family will disown me if I actually believe the truth about Jesus." Love gladly absorbs blows for the gospel. "But Pastor Tony, Christianity is hard. Holiness is hard. Worldliness is easy. It comes naturally." Listen: Love gladly absorbs blows for the gospel.

Let me say it this way, a little stronger. Soft, weak, unchallenging, and unoffending Christianity doesn't exist. It's as imaginary as unicorns and leprechauns.

Now that's not the end of the story. Watch what happens next!

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to 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 everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, ⁶⁶ supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

The jailer, alarmed by this earthquake, panicked. We discussed this earlier in **Acts**. In the Roman Empire, if prisoners escaped, the jailer was held personally responsible and would have paid for it with his life. So this jailer decides, "I'll save them the trouble and take care of that right now."⁶⁷

²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

Remember Paul is unshackled at this point. He could have very easily escaped. I'm sure a lesser man might have taken off by this point and said, "Adios, Muchacho! Have a nice life!" But that's not what happens. Paul and Silas stay put.⁶⁸

And all the other prisoners stay put too. And I don't know why! Maybe they are just stunned by what's happened. Maybe they are stuck in a catatonic state. Maybe they're terrified. Maybe they're just in awe of Paul and Silas and can't wait to see what happens next.

Look at **verse 29**.

²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.

He's terrified by what's happening. He's more afraid of Paul and Silas and their God than he is of his employers who might kill him.

³⁰ Then he brought [Paul and Silas] out and said, "Sirs, what must I do⁶⁹ to be saved?"

What a great question! "Whatever you guys got, I want it!" "Tell me what I must do to be saved."

³¹ And [Paul and Silas] said,

Here it is! Are you listening? This is the most important message you will ever hear in your life... full-stop. Maybe some of you came to church this morning, and like this jailer, you need to know how to

⁶⁴ DESIDERIUS ERASMUS: "You see that any time and any place is suitable for evangelical devotion. That prison, so terribly foul, was a temple for the apostles; the dead of night did not stand in the way of their hymns. The gospel is preached in the prison and trophies are taken for Christ; the jail is the magisterial chair of the gospel." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 235.

⁶⁵ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 106: "Paul and Silas did not base their theology on their circumstances. Instead, they evaluated those circumstances in light of what they knew to be true about God."

⁶⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 690: "He thinks that in view of the punishment for allowing the prisoners to escape, suicide would be the better alternative. As a slave, he may well have anticipated execution by crucifixion."

⁶⁷ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 445: "The jailer's near suicide over the possibility that prisoners had escaped (v. 27) is understandable when we remember that Peter's escape from prison resulted in the execution of the guards (12:19) and that the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners after the shipwreck en route to Rome rather than letting them escape (27:42)."

⁶⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 355: "The miracle served not to deliver them but rather to deliver the jailer."

⁶⁹ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 445-6: "He wanted to know what he had to 'do' to be saved, but actually there was nothing that he needed to do, for everything had already been done for him by Christ. All he was required was to believe (v. 31)."

get saved. Maybe some of you are like Lydia at the beginning of this passage. You are a God-fearer but you are not a Christ-believer yet. Here it is! This is for you! This is salvation.⁷⁰

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,

“It’s that simple?” Yes, it’s that simple. It’s so simple that a child can do that. In fact, children are better equipped to do that, as Jesus told us (see **Matt 18:3–5**).

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”⁷¹

That doesn’t mean that he believes in order to save his household. **God has no grandchildren; he only has children.** So this means that if the people of his household believe in Jesus like him, they too can be saved. Anyone and everyone who believes in Jesus, can be saved!⁷² Jews and Gentiles. Males and Females. Jailers and Jailbirds like the Apostle Paul.

Look at **verse 32.**

³² *And [Paul and Silas] spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.* ³³ *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed⁷³ their wounds; and [the jailer] was baptized at once, he and all his family.*

Talk about your *quid pro quo*. That’s a pretty good deal, right? The jailer washes their wounds, and they baptize the jailer.⁷⁴ That’s a pretty sweet trade, right there.

³⁴ *Then he brought them up into his house⁷⁵ and set food⁷⁶ before them. And he rejoiced⁷⁷ along with his entire household that he had believed⁷⁸ in God.*

Here’s Christ’s mission in action. Let me just put this in perspective for you. Instead of fleeing from the prison after the earthquake, Paul and Silas stayed put. They prevented the jailer from killing himself. They actually gave him an opportunity to receive Christ.

⁷⁰ CHRYSOSTOM: “Just as the death of the Lord put death to death, so also the shackles of Paul set the captives free, shook the prison, opened the doors.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 207.

⁷¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 692: “The members of the ‘household’ are saved (v. 31) not because the jailer hears the gospel and believes, but because they also hear the word of the Lord ‘spoke[n]’ (ἐλάλησαν), i.e., proclaimed and explained with the exhortation to believe in the Lord Jesus and thus be saved.”

⁷² RUDOLF GWALTHER: “This proves that the course of the gospel cannot be hindered by the efforts of the wicked. The ministers of the gospel might be bound, but the Word of God cannot be bound. They who preach the gospel are thrust out and banished, but the Spirit of Christ cannot be banished. He breathes wherever he pleases.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 236.

⁷³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 692: “The necessity to wash their wounds (πληγαί) indicates both the severity of the beating in the agora and the harsh and unsanitary conditions in ancient prisons in which the wounds of newly delivered prisoners were not cleaned.”

⁷⁴ BEDE: “A beautiful exchange—for them he washed the wounds from their blows, and through them he was relieved of the wounds of his own guilty acts.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 209.

⁷⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 354: “It was not unusual for a jailer to live close to the prison. In fact, the house may have been above the prison.”

⁷⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 692: “Understanding prison culture in antiquity helps one to appreciate the impropriety or even illegality of the jailer’s reaction, who was evidently more concerned for Paul and Silas and their message of salvation than for the potential consequences of his highly unusual behavior. Jailers faced punishment when they relaxed the confinement of their prisoners, especially if they had been ordered to lock up the prisoners in a maximum security cell (vv. 23–24). Jailers did not feed their prisoners: this was the responsibility of the prisoners’ relatives and friends. And dining with a prisoner may have been a punishable offense.”

⁷⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 693: “Faith in Jesus, the Lord who saves, triggers joy at the presence of the Lord—in the middle of the night, in the house of a jailer.” Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 450: “Luke’s report of joy over salvation in the home of the jailer (v. 34) is evidence of one of the most important themes in his writings. Nearly 24 percent (79 of the 326 instances) of words for joy in the New Testament appear in Luke’s Gospel (53) and Acts (24). The angels heralded the coming of Christ as “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10). The sinner Zacchaeus ‘welcomed [Jesus] gladly’ into his house (19:6), and salvation came to that home. When people find salvation, there is great rejoicing in heaven (15:7, 10). Even when believers are persecuted, they are to contemplate their heavenly reward and ‘rejoice … and leap for joy’ (6:23)… After Jesus’ resurrection the dominant emotion of the disciples that Luke records is joy (Luke 24:41, 52–53). It is not surprising, then, that the fellowship of the first Christian community was characterized by ‘unaffected joy’ (Acts 2:46). Their joy withstood the test of persecution. After the apostles were flogged, they ‘left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name’ (5:41). After Paul and Barnabas had been driven out of Pisidian Antioch, ‘the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit’ (13:52). Just as joy characterizes our entrance into the kingdom, it characterizes our life from that point on.”

⁷⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 693: “The perfect tense of the causal participle (πεπιστευκώς) indicates a state of affairs: they had become believers.”

And this is the guy who put them in stocks. This is the guy who had helped torture them. And amazingly this jailer along with his entire household receives Christ. And they all get baptized that very night.

Now the young church in Philippi has Lydia and her household as parishioners. They also have this converted jailer and his household. That's quite a motley crew to start a church with. And all it cost Paul and Silas to plant this church was about twenty-four hours of opposition, torture, and excruciating pain. But their suffering wasn't in vain.⁷⁹ God used it. **God never wastes suffering.**⁸⁰

Now watch this. Let's finish this up. Paul does something unexpected at the end of this passage. Everything in this passage before **verse 35**, we've seen before. We've seen Paul suffering. We've seen Paul preach. We've seen people get saved.

But look at **verse 35**. This is new.

³⁵ *But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go."*

Oh! The magistrates have had a change of heart, have they? I don't even know why. Perhaps they realized how criminal their actions were the previous day.

³⁶ *And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace."* ³⁷ *But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens*

In the first century world, possession of Roman citizenship was a big deal. And these magistrates could have gotten into a lot of trouble for beating and imprisoning a citizen without a proper trial.⁸¹ So Paul, aware of this impropriety, draws their attention to this fact.⁸²

And remember what I said earlier about Philippi being a Roman colony (**16:12**). That was important to the city of Philippi. They were a proud city with a rich history. And they didn't want their colony status revoked by these misdeeds. So they are motivated to appease Paul and Silas.

And notice the word "citizens" is plural here. Paul and Silas are both Roman citizens, which was probably not true of Barnabas. So Paul's new partner comes in handy here.⁸³

And here's the accusation:

*"They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out."*⁸⁴

Wow, Paul sounds a little huffy here, doesn't he? Why's he getting all high-and-mighty with these magistrates? Why's he doing this? Do you know?

You might say, **"Just turn the other cheek, Paul. Come on, Paul! Just take your punishment like a man. Why are you resorting to human ways of protecting yourself?"**

Paul's attitude might seem a little ungracious here, but he does this in order to protect the future of the church. He does this to put these new Philippian believers (the jailer and his family plus Lydia and her family)

⁷⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 101: "Acts chapters 4, 5, 7, 8, and 12 record the persecution of the early church. Yet all those instances only resulted in the strengthening of the church and an increase in its numbers (4:4)."

⁸⁰ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 55–6: "He fell to the ground and asked for the way of salvation because he had seen God in Paul and Silas. He had seen the power of the Lord manifested through them and around him. How often do Christians today find themselves asked questions about the way of salvation? Perhaps many Christians today fail to exhibit the joy of the gospel in the midst of trials, as Paul and Silas did that night. Perhaps believers in Christ today surrender their godliness and do not exude the fruit of the Spirit, as Paul and Silas had throughout their time in Philippi. Like moths drawn to a flame, nonbelievers will often run toward the light of Christ as he manifests himself through those who faithfully walk in accordance with his ways."

⁸¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 357n44: "How did one prove citizenship? We don't know. Public records were kept, usually on small wooden diptychs which were small enough to be carried on one's person. Evidence indicates that this was not usually done, but rather they were deposited with one's valuables. Except for the military and merchants, society was not all that mobile; and transients like Paul and Silas were somewhat rare. One probably did not normally lie about citizenship; it was an offense punishable by death."

⁸² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 357: "The emperor could deprive Philippi of all the privileges of its colony status for such an offense."

⁸³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 356: "Cicero wrote: 'To fetter a Roman citizen was a crime, to scourge him was a scandal, to slay him—parricide.'"

⁸⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 357: "The situation was ironic. Paul and Silas had been treated as criminals but were innocent. The magistrates who condemned them now found themselves genuine lawbreakers."

in the good graces of the city officials. And by doing this he actually provides a way to advance the gospel further. Paul's smart, you see. He knows what he's doing.⁸⁵

Write this down as a fourth and final point in your notes.

Advancing Christ's mission means:

- 1) **eagerly yielding** to Spiritual prompting (Acts 16:11–15)
- 2) **boldly confronting** satanic opposition (Acts 16:16–24)
- 3) **gladly absorbing** blows for the gospel (Acts 16:25–34)
- 4) **shrewdly discerning** how to advance the gospel (Acts 16:35–40)

Let's see what happens now. Look at verse 38.

³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that [Paul and Silas] were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they⁸⁶ encouraged them⁸⁷ and departed.⁸⁸

This was, I think, Paul's way of protecting the church. This was Paul's way of putting this "baby church" in a good position to continue spreading the gospel.⁸⁹

Actually I love the way this passage ends because it shows that Paul wasn't just out looking for a beating. He's not a masochist. He's not just looking for an opportunity to suffer. He's strategic.⁹⁰

If the fight came to him and he needed to suffer, he was up for it. If the church needed to suffer, he told the church to endure. But if there was an opportunity to assuage the powers-that-be and prevent suffering in order to propagate the gospel, Paul would do that.⁹¹

He shrewdly discerned how to best advance the gospel. And in this case that meant flashing his "Roman Citizen" badge in order to get the governmental powers to back down.

In closing, let me say this. And let me say this as authoritatively as I can. If you love Jesus Christ... how many people in this room love Jesus? If you love Jesus Christ, you will suffer for him. If you love the gospel, if you love the greatest truth this world has ever known, that we are sinners saved by grace, saved by faith, saved by Christ's blood, you will face opposition. The Bible says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Matt 16:24–26).

Listen, if there's another thing out there more worthy of my life or my death, than Jesus Christ, I haven't found it yet. And I want to challenge you today with this question—what are you living for? What are you willing to die for? What are you willing to suffer for?

⁸⁵ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 25: "Paul could be tough! He refused to be dealt with summarily because he did not want the idea that he and Silas were lawbreakers to stand. A public escort from jail by the ruling magistrates would publish their innocence, and that would bring protection to Lydia and her house church as well."

⁸⁶ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 447: "According to verse 40, 'they [note *third person plural*] left' Philippi. Presumably, therefore, Luke stayed on in Philippi and joined Paul again after his return visit to Philippi, at which time the first person plural reappears (20:6)."

⁸⁷ JOHANN SPANGENBERG: "After they visited and consoled the brothers, they departed in peace and preached the Word of life. May Jesus Christ help us to do this also. Amen." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 236.

⁸⁸ CHRYSOSTOM: "They departed, not in obedience to the magistrates, but hastening to the work of preaching. For the city had been sufficiently benefited by the miracle." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 210.

⁸⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 110: "Paul refused to be disposed of so flippantly. He did not seek revenge, but He did not want his and Silas's ill-treatment to become a precedent for the mistreatment of other Christians. For Paul and Silas to have departed quietly could have set a dangerous precedent for the future treatment of missionaries and exposed the believers to arbitrary and abusive action from the magistrates."

⁹⁰ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 448: "On the one hand, we rejoice when we are persecuted for Christ's name, and we know that persecution yields a plentiful harvest. Thus, we must never compromise our calling in order to avoid persecution. But we also know that the freedom to proclaim the gospel unhindered can be a great aid to its forward march. Thus, we must always seek to secure this freedom if we can do so without compromising our principles."

⁹¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 356: "To protect his rights, Paul used civil law to his advantage. There is nothing wrong with believers following the apostle's example as long as they do not use the law wrongfully or try to hide behind it when guilty."

**Paul and Silas worshipping Christ in that prison with their backs bleeding and their feet in stocks.
Whatever they have, I want that.**