

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ Triumphs over Demons

Acts 16:16-23

Keywords: Missions, 2nd Missionary Journey, Demons, Exorcism, Suffering, Divination

PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: We continue following Paul and his companions as they begin to bring the gospel into Europe. In this sermon we see them come into contact with demonic forces and how, through the power and authority of Jesus, they overcome.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read 16:16-23.
- B. We come to a part of Acts that I have been waiting to get to for quite some time.
 - 1. The passage itself, though it is rather interesting, is also not hard to understand.
 - 2. But behind it are a few points of concern that I want to bring to your attention and bring clarity to beliefs and practices that are not wise, good or proper for a Christian.
- C. As sound theology is lost through weak preaching and teaching, invariably a subjective alternative form of knowledge replaces it.
 - 1. This is a key cause of the massive rise of the Charismatic, New Apostolic Reformation, Third Wave Movement and such. In all of them, a key component is the hearing and speaking of so-called fresh words from God through prophets, dreams and visions. T
 - 2. hough often there is the claim of looking to the bible as the revelation of God, in reality, the bible becomes a secondary source of truth as people look to the spiritual realm for their knowledge and guidance.
- D. In our passage we come into contact with how the spirit realm can connect with our realm of existence.
 - 1. Last week I spoke about territorial spirits and angels. Today we find a young woman who is possessed by a demon.
 - 2. Now in chapter 16 Luke brings our attention to three different people who were radically changed by the gospel.
 - a. The first was Lydia, today it will be the demon possessed girl and next will be the jailer.

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- b. In each of these stories what is to be understood is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is stronger and greater. The gospel gives life, sets people free and delivers them from eternal death.
- c. Just like Jesus, as He entered into his earthly ministry.
 - (1) Remember that He would resist the temptations of Satan, He did a vast assortment of miracles and He raised the dead.
 - (2) In all of these events He is showing that He is Lord over all things. The bread, the water, the dead and the demons all must obey him.
- d. Now, here, Paul and the others are proclaiming Jesus to the people and in doing so, they show that Jesus truly is the Lord over all.
- E. We will cover many things in this little section but in and through it all is the fact that Christ triumphs over the demonic realm.

II. Christ Triumphs over Demons.

- A. The demonic reality (16-17)
 - 1. The men were on their way back out to the river where they had met Lydia. No doubt this was to engage more people, specifically Jews, with the gospel. But there was a divine interruption by way of a demon.
 - 2. This “spirit of divination” has some interesting historical and religious roots.
 - a. You could properly translate this as “Spirit of a python.” *pythōn* (πύθων) refers to a giant dragon.
 - b. This young girl is possessed by a demon and from the viewpoint of the average person, it would not be seen as a bad thing.
 - 3. Key background material: There is a place **in Greece** called Delphi. And centuries before this event in Acts Delphi became a major influence upon the world.
 - 4. Delphi was originally supposed to be the home of Gaia, the goddess of the earth. It was considered to be the center of the earth and many made pilgrimages to it.
 - 5. This person, this oracle, lived in a shrine built on a **sacred site** at Delphi.

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- a. Many believed that the oracle was a messenger of the Greek god, Apollo.
 - b. Every month, during the lunar cycle, she would enter a trance-like state, possibly inhaling vapors from a fissure in the earth, which was believed to enhance her prophetic abilities.
 - c. One of the more common explanations on what would happen is that in this state, she would deliver cryptic messages that the priests would later interpret for the those who paid for her messages.
 - d. But many other accounts of her words being fully understandable on their own.
6. **This** woman was regarded as the high priestess of the Temple of Apollo who was the oracle the dragon spirit named *Pythia*.
 - a. She functioned as a medium, a mouth-piece for this spirit. It was believed that the link of this oracle provided a direct link between the gods and man.
 - b. She was highly sought after and trusted and was considered the most powerful of all oracles. Powerful people would pay large sums of money to consult with her.
 - c. She would sit on a special, three-legged chair while she uttered her prophecies.
7. The oracle was at its height from 6 BC to 4 BC. Originally, as I said earlier, this site was dedicated to the Earth goddess call Gaia but later Apollo took control over it.
 - a. According to the legend, Apollo killed the serpent/dragon Python who guarded this site. The battle was epic and only after Apollo shot off a hundred arrows did Python die.
 - b. Python was said to be born from the earth itself and possessed the earth's wisdom. Apollo then became the possessor of that sacred ground as well as the possessor of the power of Python as its corpse rotted.
 - c. The Pythian priestess would be filled with the divine spirit. One account speaks of how she would be utterly under the control of the spirit and that her voice would fill the entire place while her hair bristled, items would be overturned and she would writhe as in pain, yet remember nothing afterward.

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8. Understand that in the Greek worldview there would be a sort of mania that was superior to sanity because it came from the gods.
 - a. The Pythian spirit was not limited to Delphi. Josephus, the historian, records how Herod the Great built a Pythian temple on the Greek island of Rhodes.
 - b. The people in Philippi would think nothing of this young girl functioning as a mouthpiece for this spirit. It is normal and acceptable.
9. A person who would function as a medium and give prophecies and fortune-telling would be said to have the spirit of Python.
 - a. This is simply demonic possession. For the average unbeliever in the world at Paul's time, this event would be unremarkable.
 - b. There was a consistent interplay between this realm and the realm of the gods and spirits. I
 - c. In fact, this young girl was seen as a good, helpful tool to know the minds of the gods. Why wouldn't they want to consult her?
10. And this practice of divination was big business. These people were often sought to help in deciding family problems and business ventures. But also they would be consulted for matters of the state.
 - a. But this is not all. Later in Acts 19 you will meet Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines. Amulets and bracelets and such were made by other people as a form of protection from spirits. There would be the efforts by some magicians to create an amulet imbued with a more powerful spirit to ward off spiritual attacks from another spirit.
 - b. All of this was big business and it still is. You see people with statues on their dashboards. You see them in the homes and on the persons. I had a Vietnamese owner of a restaurant who had a jade bracelet that has special powers to keep her safe from bad spirits. In Cameroon all of the various transportation vehicles would have religious statements on them, functioning as magic charms.
 - c. All of this costs money.
11. Notice that though the demon was possessing this young lady, nonetheless it spoke truth.

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- a. Get this through your head. All of creation knows who Jesus is and what He has accomplished. A
 - b. All of creation knows the gospel and is anticipating the fulness and completion of it. Some with joy and some with terror, but they all know it is true.
 - c. **Matthew 8:29**, *“And behold, [the demons] cried out, saying, ‘What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?’”*
 - d. **Mark 3:11**, *“And whenever the unclean spirits were seeing Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, ‘You are the Son of God!’”*
 - e. **James 2:19**, *“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”*
12. Except for humans.
- a. Oh, no. You and I made in the image of God. Made a little lower than the angels. Not us. We lie and reject and deny our Creator.
 - b. A demon hates God. But he will not deny Him. He cannot, for he knows the truth. But people? Oh, we sit and dwell in a universe of which we did nothing. And we give glory to the creation and none to the Creator. Our judgment is well deserved.
 - c. In 1 Timothy 4:1, people will depart from the Christian faith by listening to the lies and teachings of demons.
 - (1) We see men and women of every age live out their life of rebellion. We seek to reject God or remake God. Many claim to follow Christ but then give themselves over to everything opposed to Him.
 - (2) A lot of times the giving of ourselves to the teachings of demons is not as obvious as we think.
13. Two areas that are very common are using psychics or mediums. Psychics give some sort of readings about your past, present or future. While the medium is functioning as a channel through which supposedly your relatives or someone special communicates from the grave.
- a. For some, this is just a trick where they fleece unwitting individuals. But this is not always the case. Often this begins through the acceptance of a christianized pagan practice.

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- b. Here is another example, the Enneagram has been co-opted by many Christian leaders claiming it is merely a personality test that helps us to love people better. The Enneagram was created through what is called "automatic writing" which is simply a form of mediumship. This automatic writing was accomplished by, according to the creator Claudio Naranjo, that he was possessed and it was a spirit working through him. Its roots are firmly within the occult. And yet this is held as a popular and important tool in so many churches.
 - c. Often we will see people argue that it is no big deal. Foolish Christians say that they can redeem what is born out of the minds of Satan. Untold people say that the enneagram helped them or their friend.
 - d. But notice this young lady. She is possessed by a demon. She is speaking truth, including that Paul's group are proclaiming the way of salvation. So, does Paul just say, "All truth is God's truth?" Does he co-opt her into his evangelistic efforts? No.
14. We read this story and think that this is for "back then." But the paganization of America is almost complete.
- a. The majority of people in the U. S. believe in at least one type of New Age, pagan belief, with karma being the most common.
 - b. Through outlets such as Joe Rogan's podcast the rise in the use of psychedelic drugs to reach altered states and encountering of various spirit beings that then become their guides.
 - c. I've been to West Africa several times where the practice of JuJu, which came from a word for evil spirit. Through the use of amulets, charms, spells and such to protect themselves from the spirit realm. But also there is a heavy use of blood rituals through both human and animal blood sacrifices to bring about supernatural powers. They rely on witch doctors who commune and channel these spirits.
 - d. Through the slave trade, this was carried over to areas such as Haiti and Jamaica the word was corrupted and became Voodoo, which has a blending of Juju and RCC practices.
 - e. Along with these there is Santeria which is a blending of voodoo, juju and catholic practices and is common throughout Central and South America. Again, through divination, channeling and blood

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sacrifices the priests or priestesses will seek to commune with Orishas.

- f. These are spirits with certain domains in which they rule and function as guides and protectors. Often catholic saints are intertwined as mediators into the spirit world.
- g. I had hispanic employees in Houston, TX who would consult with these people to seek protection or guidance.
- h. You will hear Christians say things such as "instant karma" or "He's bad juju." This includes the use of incense and oils for the purpose of "centering the soul But all of this is simply incorporating language and ideas that should have no place in the minds and mouths of believers.

15. All of this is expressly forbidden in Scripture.

- a. **Israel was told**, "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)
- b. Paul points out that those who practice any sort of idolatry or sorcery are in grave sin and their soul is at peril. That word, "sorcery," is the term we get pharmacy from. It is the use of anything that alters your mind to give you deeper, secret knowledge or to access the spirit-realm.

16. And here we now see the power of God in action.

B. The demon defeated (18)

- 1. So Paul and his team are trying to evangelize through conversations and wherever they go, this girl is following them yelling out loud about them. She was known by the people, they were not. Eventually we find Paul annoyed therefore he casts out the demon.
- 2. Two simple questions: Why the delay? And why cast out the demon? And the answer is that the message and the messenger matters with the gospel.
- 3. First, the message.

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- a. These are slaves of the Most High God who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation. True.
 - b. But also not clear. Within a culture that would exist in Philippi, this can mean many things. Zeus was the highest deity in the Greek pantheon of gods. In fact there are many inscriptions on buildings with this very statement regarding Zeus.
 - c. The idea of being slaves (servants) of the Most High would makes sense in their polytheistic world view as well. It speaks of being fully devoted to the god Zeus.
 - d. And finally, "way of salvation" is not as clear as you might think. In our English translations we include the definite article "the" but this is not part of the Greek. It has no article making this as only one way of salvation, one of many. So, when we read this it is read through our preconceptions as Christians. But in the eyes and ears of those in Philippi it would be quite different.
4. Second, the messenger matters as well.
- a. I honestly believe that there are some today who would take this girl and use her to help bridge the cultural gaps that would exist between a Jew like Paul and the Gentile pagans.
 - b. We see it all the time in the folly of churches who have their "See You at The Movies" series. Or using the Simpsons or Mayberry RFD as the foundation for SS curriculum.
 - c. When Kanye West supposedly converted the large number of people who thought this was a good thing and that he was making a massive impact. And immediately there was the propping up of a man to now get the message out to the masses.
 - d. But this is not God's way. He calls His teachers and preachers. They do not appoint themselves, they become qualified through spiritual maturity and knowledge of sound doctrine. This young girl was possessed by a demon and there was no way Paul would allow her to be a mouthpiece for his labors, even tangentially.
5. And so this spirit is cast out by Paul after many days of enduring it.
- a. This shows also that demonic deliverance ministry was not his central task in any way. He was about the preaching of the gospel.

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- b. So the demon is cast out in “the name of Jesus Christ.” But what does this mean? This is a common error that pops up over and over again so I want to address this clearly to each of you.
- c. First, simply note that Paul was not the one causing the spirit to depart from this girl. Paul was invoking the person and authority of Jesus Christ.
 - (1) The focus is not upon Paul but upon who Paul is proclaiming to the people of this city. And as such, there was no debate or battle taking place.
 - (2) here was no histrionics, or weird levitation or some other strange event. Simply put, the demon left.
- d. Second, understand that to do something in the name of Jesus is not some guarantee that it will be done. It is not a magic phrase like abracadabra.
 - (1) The power is not in the statement, the power and authority is in the person of Jesus.
 - (2) So, when Paul commands the spirit to leave it is based on the rightful authority and power granted by Jesus that the spirit is compelled to obey.
- e. So when a person attempts to do something in the name of Jesus but it is not consistent with the authority given to him by God or is not consistent with who Jesus is or the mission of Jesus, there is nothing there to be seen. When you baptize a person in the name of Jesus it means that they are identifying themselves with the person and work of Jesus.
- f. In the same way, John 14 talks of if one asks anything in the name of Christ then it will be done.
 - (1) But this was given to the disciples, soon to become apostles.
 - (2) But also to ask in the name of Jesus means that you are asking in such a manner that is consistent with His character, purposes and will. You are praying just like Jesus would pray. And that puts a whole different spin on it.
 - (3) This is why we require all who pray at the beginning of our service to write out their prayers and submit them to us for

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review. We want to make sure that what is said is faithful to the Word and will of Jesus.

- (4) In prayer I come to the Father "in the name of Jesus" because that is the authority and basis upon which I am able to come in prayer. It is not my righteousness or my importance; rather, it rests in only Jesus.
- (5) And as I ask, I commit the requests as things that matter only if they fit His purposes. In other words, not my will but the Father's. So I have confidence in my access but I also have confidence that God shall work out His perfect, sovereign will in and through my prayers. But never, do I think I can invoke the name of Jesus to make something happen.

C. The demonic reaction (19-24)

- 1. The Christian faith is counter to the entire religious systems of this age. And when the true gospel is brought to bear on the myriad of other beliefs, the reaction can be quite violent.
- 2. False religion seeks to accomplish two things in the lives of people, enrich the leaders or grant them power. So make this clear in your minds, the gospel of Jesus Christ is utterly opposed to all other messages, gods, methods, purposes or teachings.
- 3. They are brought before the authorities and are being abused. But also note the hatred toward Jews in general (20).
 - a. And this is how it works so often beloved, the real issue is said in vs 19 but the stated reason, which is a lie, is stated in vs 21.
 - b. **James 3:14-15** makes it clear where this sort of reaction comes from. *"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic."*
- 4. In vss 23-24 we see the hatred the people had because this girl was freed from the demonic spirit.
 - a. What stands out though is the severity of the beating. This was a brutal punishment that would be made all the worse because they were then put into stocks.
 - b. This was done in the inner part of the jail. Today we would call it solitary confinement or maximum security. One man noted that 18

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years earlier Paul had put Christians into prison, now it was his turn.

- c. The pain is upon the men (I doubt Mark would have endured at this time). They cannot move due to the stocks so every wound would be multiplied in pain and misery.
- 5. One thing stands out in this however. Paul did not exercise his rights as a Roman citizen here. Why?
 - a. It is not stated but likely because Paul's missionary efforts had only just begun. To invoke his rights would immediately create a long delay.
 - b. The lesson here is to consider Paul when you want to invoke your rights. The fact that you have rights is less important than the gospel witness. And each of us must be convinced in our own minds when we may or may not invoke those rights.
- 6. And the jailer himself is ordered to guard them securely, which sets us up for next week.

III. Conclusion.

- A. At MDF we seek to be a blessing in this city and to the people we encounter.
- B. We seek to adorn the gospel message with actions that befit servants of the Most High God.
- C. But do not be fooled beloved. It comes with a cost.
 - 1. The message of Jesus Christ is a message of rebellion and rejection of all the powers of this age. You cannot be friends with the things of this age and with God. To claim Jesus as your Savior is to turn from the things of this age.
 - 2. But it is worth it for God is faithful and will raise you up in the last day. He shall wipe your tears. And He will invite you into His eternal joy.
 - 3. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Benediction

May you go in the love of the Father resting in the fulness of His grace. May you walk in hope through the rich calling in which you have in Jesus Christ our Lord. May your power not be found in you but through the presence of the Holy Spirit. And may we all continue to grow together in true unity.