



Some feel like God is so far away, a distant deity.

But the Gospel message demonstrates that our God is not distant, changing lives in an instant!

Salvation is HERE!

CATCH THE CONEXT

The “missionary quartet”¹ of Paul, Silas, Timothy, & Luke have arrived in the Roman colony of **Philippi**, after responding to the vision of a man asking them to come come help them in Macedon (Acts 16:9-10). Evidently there was no synagogue there. Without at least ten male household leaders a synagogue couldn’t be formed. In that case, the faithful were to meet outdoors near running water.²

Acts 16:13-14a (NET)¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there.¹⁴ A woman named **Lydia**, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a **God-fearing woman**, listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.¹⁵ After **she and her household were baptized**, she urged us, “If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us.

Dispersed Jews were expected to wash hands before prayer³, hence most synagogues were built near running water. This is likely why the missionaries went to the **river** to seek out Jews meeting in a **place of prayer** on the **Sabbath**.

Evidently, no men were there, so the missionaries **began to speak to the women who had assembled there**. One of those women was **Lydia** about whom we are told 3 facts:

- 1) Lydia was a **dealer in purple cloth** from **Thyatira** - a wealthy woman who used her possessions to further the Kingdom.
- 2) Lydia was a **God-fearing woman**. This is a Gentile who recognized the one true God and attempted to walk in obedience to Him, but a person who had not been through the proselyte process to become a full Jew. Remember Cornelius, called “God-fearer” in Acts 10:2.
- 3) Lydia **listened** to the missionary’s message! They likely shared how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Old Covenant in his life, death, burial, resurrection, & ascension to heaven.

The Lord opened her heart to respond: This was more than just Paul’s persuasion; the Lord Jesus was working on the inside. Lydia comes to play a large role throughout this area. She opens her home for the church to meet there and is quite an encourager to all she comes into contact with! This is the beginning of the church at Philippi whom Paul later writes these words to:

Philippians 1:3-5 (NET)³ I thank my God every time I remember you.⁴ I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you⁵ because of **your participation in the gospel from the first day until now**.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 212.

² Ibid.

³ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1–23:35*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2385.

☀ **MacArthur:** "As the church took root in Philippi, Satan moved to attack it."⁴

Acts 16:16-18 (NET) ¹⁶ Now as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means. She brought her owners a great profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed behind Paul and us and kept crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ She continued to do this for many days. But **Paul became 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 of her at once.

In the Roman & Greek cultures, no commander began a major military campaign nor would an emperor make an important decree without first consulting a fortune teller.⁵ A slave girl with this ability was a "gold mine" who **brought her owners a great profit**.⁶

These men are servants of the Most High God: Isn't what this demon-possessed slave girl saying TRUE? If so, then why would Paul want her to hush?

God's enemies want to cause confusion rather than clarity truth.

Within the Roman culture "**Most High God**" was frequently applied to Zeus. In Roman culture, **Salvation** had nothing to do with repentance, Jesus, & forgiveness. The terms "savior" and "salvation" were often applied to the emperor and to Greco-Roman heroes who brought health, healing, or rescue to a pagan.⁷ The demon might communicated Jesus to be ANOTHER WAY to salvation, but never THE ONLY WAY to salvation.

☀ **Kent Hughes:** "She was a clairvoyant owned by spiritual pimps who sold her metaphysical powers. Satan's strategy was obvious: to derail the gospel by infiltrating it, by forming an apparent alliance with Christ's work—for his own ends, of course."⁸

Paul had enough of the arch-rival pretending to cheer for the team, and by **the name of Jesus Christ** (e.g. authority) kicked the demon out of the woman. Note how quickly the enemy changed tactics. If the devil could not **infiltrate**, he would **persecute**.

Acts 16:19-21 (NET) ¹⁹ But when her owners saw **their hope of profit was gone**, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰ When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion. They are Jews ²¹ and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us to accept or practice, since we are Romans."

If the claims about Jesus were true, then Roman culture & customs needed to change.

- Fortune telling and the wealth it brought would be gone.
- Polytheism (many gods) was not true. Monotheism (one God) is true. All the stories & family traditions about gods & demigods needed to be discarded.
- Temples & temple practices - including sacrifices & sexual activity - would be abandoned. Followers of Jesus would trust in His sacrifice & live in sexual purity in marriage.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 326.

⁵ John B. Polhill, *Acts, vol. 26, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 351.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 495.

⁸ Hughes, 214.

Imagine communities where Jesus was taking over. Business owners & non-Christian cults losing money & members likely wouldn't stay quiet. That's what happened in Philippi.

Acts 16:22-25 (NET) ²² The crowd joined the attack against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods.²³ After they had beaten them severely, they threw them into prison and commanded the jailer to guard them securely. ²⁴ Receiving such orders, he threw them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight **Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God**, and the rest of the prisoners were listening to them.

Paul used to be the one who would drag off men and women and put this into prison for following Jesus (Acts 8:3). Maximum security prison would surely shut them up! Nope.

Despite not receiving a fair hearing and being badly beaten, they guys were still **praying and singing hymns to God**. The other **prisoners were listening to them**. How could the two missionaries praise God under such conditions? They knew that God had not left them.

🕒 God's love for YOU isn't determined by circumstances; it was demonstrated at the cross!

☀️ **MacArthur:** *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. Their songs expressed confident trust that God would use their circumstances for their good and His glory.*⁹

Paul wrote these words to the Philippians:

Philippians 4:4-7 (NET) ⁴ **Rejoice in the Lord always.** Again I say, rejoice! ⁵ Let everyone see your gentleness. **The Lord is near!** ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

When's the last time you REJOICED in the fact that - regardless of your circumstances - through it all...

The Lord will hear you because He's near you!

God certainly heard Paul & Silas that evening, and responded with power.

Acts 16:26-32 (NET) ²⁶ Suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately all the doors flew open, and the bonds of all the prisoners came loose. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, because he assumed the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul called out loudly, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" ²⁹ Calling for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They replied, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved**, you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house.

The jailer had two options: 1) He kills himself or 2) his superiors kill him. After Paul calls out, this jailer is thoroughly humbled & fell down **trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas**.

The Gospel message: **Believe in the Lord Jesus - Jesus + nothing = EVERYTHING!**

⁹ MacArthur, 326.

There was much more they needed to communicate about WHO Jesus was and so **they spoke the word of the Lord to him** along with his household. After explaining the good news of Jesus Paul & Silas in some way, shape, or form shared this great truth.

The Lord will hear you because He's near you!

Acts 17:26-27 (NET) ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of the human race to inhabit the entire earth, determining their set times and the fixed limits of the places where they would live,²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though **he is not far from each one of us**.

Romans 10:11-13 (NET)¹¹ For the scripture says, *"Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."*¹² For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him. ¹³ For **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved**.

Acts 16:33-34 (NET) ³³ At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then **he and all his family were baptized right away**.³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set food before them, and **he rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God**, together with his entire household.

Could it be that THIS MAN was the one Paul had seen in the vision that brought them to Philippi (Acts 16:9-10)? We don't know. Here's what we DO know: Now his whole family could share the gospel message, encouraging those in Philippi to **believe in Jesus**.

Acts 16:35-40 (NET) ³⁵ At daybreak the magistrates sent their police officers, saying, "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent orders to release you. So come out now and go in peace."³⁷ But Paul said to the police officers, "They had us beaten in public without a proper trial—even though we are Roman citizens—and they threw us in prison. And now they want to send us away secretly? Absolutely not! They themselves must come and escort us out!"³⁸ The police officers reported these words to the magistrates. They were frightened when they heard **Paul and Silas were Roman citizens** ³⁹ and came and apologized to them. After they brought them out, they asked them repeatedly to leave the city. ⁴⁰ When they came out of the prison, they entered Lydia's house, and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and then departed.

And with that, the Philippian church was born: **Lydia & her household**, and likely many of the friends who prayed with her at the river; **the Philippian jailer & his family**.

FEET2FAITH

1. Ask God to help you see what He is doing.
2. Point others to the reality that Jesus is ONE PRAYER AWAY.

The Lord will hear you because He's near you!