

This morning we are continuing through the book of Acts, the story of the early church. We are up to Acts 16 this morning, a section focused on Paul and his missionary journeys as he brings the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to cities around the Roman Empire in Europe and Asia. In Acts 16, we see Paul in Philippi, and we have recorded here three stories of God using very different means to bring three very different people to faith in Jesus.

Let's begin in Acts 16:6-12:

**Acts 16:6-40** - *Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. <sup>11</sup> From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup> From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.*

Notice a couple of things. The narrative moves from **third person to 1<sup>st</sup> person plural** here, as Luke, the author of Acts, joins Paul's missionary team. Notice as well that Luke takes very careful notes about where they go. Again, this is history, this is not fairy tale. And notice the leading of the Spirit, calling them one place and blocking their entrance to another.

<sup>13</sup> *On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.*

Typically when Paul entered a city, he would look for a synagogue. That gave him a place where people were already seeking God where he could share about Jesus. In Philippi, however, there is no synagogue. Ten Jewish men were needed to establish a synagogue, and evidently there weren't that many. So they looked for a place of prayer, where some people might be gathering for worship. And they find some women who have gathered for prayer and worship. **Good lesson in here about looking for signs of spiritual openness.**

*<sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

Luke highlights one woman in particular who comes to faith, Lydia. We know she is a businesswoman, owning her own business, dealing with purple cloths, something that only very wealthy people could afford. She was a God-fearer, Gentiles who had left paganism and started seeking the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. She is a spiritual seeker. Paul and his companions sit down and join them. **The Lord opens her heart.** She becomes attracted to what Paul is saying. She comes to faith, she is baptized along with others in her household, and she opens her home to Paul and his companions to stay in, persuading Paul to let her use her home as a ministry center.

*<sup>16</sup> Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." <sup>18</sup> She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.*

Very different person. She is a girl. Probably 10-14 years old. A slave. A demon-possessed pagan. Tormented on the inside, spoke out wildly in different voices. But her predictions came true. She is shrieking, but telling the truth. Calls to mind James 2:19 -

**James 2:19** - *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and **shudder.***

**There is a spiritual reality, but not every spirit is good.** She is possessed by demons. She knows this is the truth but is repelled by it. Paul gets annoyed and casts out the demon. She needed a new master, someone who would break through her slavery. And Jesus does just that through Paul's prayer. But Paul and Silas face a backlash as a result of their actions.

*<sup>19</sup> When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the*

authorities. <sup>20</sup> They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar <sup>21</sup> by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to **accept or practice**." <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The jailer is retired military. He doesn't bandage them up, he just puts them in the stocks. He puts them in the inner cell, away from light and air. He puts them in the stocks. It splayed your limbs out and caused painful leg cramps. He was unnecessarily cruel.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! **We are all here!**" <sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were **baptized**. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God-- he and his whole family. <sup>35</sup> When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." <sup>36</sup> The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace." <sup>37</sup> But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw **us into prison**. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." <sup>38</sup> The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. <sup>39</sup> They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. <sup>40</sup> After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

Very different person. Roman, ex-military, cruel, indifferent to the gospel. The jailer has been cruel to them, but instead of wailing and crying, Paul and Silas are worshiping God. And when they are freed, the jailer is about to kill himself for failing to do his job. But Paul shouts out “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” And the jailer falls trembling before Paul and Silas and asks, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul replies, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.” And he and his family are baptized. He invites them into his house and washes their wounds. **Paul and Silas are given the opportunity to pay the jailer back for his cruelty to them. But they show him kindness and mercy. Through the witness of Paul in the face of suffering and cruelty, he is converted.**

What do we learn from this passage?

1) God brings people to Himself through many different means.

Some, like Lydia, come through or hearing the words of Scripture, through Bible study or preaching. One example would be John Wesley, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Englishman known for beginning the Methodist Church:

*On this day, May 24th, 1738 he opened his [Bible](#) at about five in the morning and came across these words, "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should partakers of the divine nature." **He read similar words in other places.***

*That evening he reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate. Someone read from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to Romans. About 8:45 p.m. "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."*

Some, like the slave girl, are converted through the power of prayer and God’s miraculous intervention. They have experiences of the power of God, setting them free from oppression or addiction. Think of Bill Wilson, founder of AA, and all who have been set free by the power of God from addiction through the years.

Others, like the jailer, are converted through the witness of other believers, especially in times of suffering. Think of Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, who was a tenured English professor at Syracuse, in a committed lesbian relationship, with a specialty in queer theory. Through the love and care of a local pastor and his wife,

she eventually turned to Christ. Her story is recounted in her book, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*.

There is no one way people come to Christ. Share the gospel. Pray for God's power and reality to be real in people's lives. Live faithfully to him, especially in the face of suffering. Paul & Silas moved the jailer by their love and mercy towards someone who should have been their enemy.

**Matthew 5:43-47** - *You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* <sup>44</sup> *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* <sup>45</sup> *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* <sup>46</sup> *If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?* <sup>47</sup> *And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*

Your witness in suffering is powerful:

**Acts 5:40-41** - *His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.* <sup>41</sup> *The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted **worthy** of **suffering** disgrace for the Name.*

**James 1:2-4** - *Consider it **pure joy**, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,* <sup>3</sup> *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.* <sup>4</sup> *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Suffering gives you an opportunity to display your trust in God, your belief that He is using it for good. You see Jesus:

**Hebrews 12:1-3** - *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* <sup>2</sup> *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* <sup>3</sup> *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*



Persecution gives you an opportunity to display God's grace by loving your enemies. What if his answer to your prayer is to give you opportunities like this?

## 2) To come to God, you must believe in Jesus

<sup>30</sup> *He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* <sup>31</sup> *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household."*

Nothing you can do but receive His mercy. This could be done by a child or an adult. Jesus died forgiving his enemies. It's about laying down your rights, not asserting your rights.

This brings to mind Charles Spurgeon's conversion (Spurgeon is generally considered one of the greatest preachers of all time):

*On January 6, 1850, 15-year-old Charles Spurgeon was trudging up Hythe Hill in Colchester, on his way to church. When the blizzard prevented him from going further, he turned the corner and made his way into a small Primitive Methodist Church on Artillery Street.*

*He wrote:*

*I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning, when I was going to a place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a court and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there might be a dozen or fifteen people. The minister did not come that morning: snowed up, I suppose. A poor man, a shoemaker, a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say. The text was, 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth' [Isa 45:22].*

*He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in the text. He began thus:*

*'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, "Look." Now that does not take a deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger; it is just "look." Well, a man need not go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man need not be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone*

can look; a child can look. But this is what the text says. Then it says, **“Look unto Me.”**

*‘Ay,’ said he, in broad Essex, ‘many of ye are looking to yourselves. No use looking there. You’ll never find comfort in yourselves.’*

*Then the good man followed up his text in this way:*

*‘Look unto Me: I am sweating great drops of blood.*

*Look unto Me; I am hanging on the Cross.*

*Look: I am dead and buried.*

*Look unto Me; I rise again.*

*Look unto Me; I ascend; I am sitting at the Father’s right hand.*

***O, look to Me! Look to Me!’***

*When he had got about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes, he was at the length of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. He then said, ‘Young man, you look very miserable.’*

*Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the pulpit before. **However, it was a good blow struck. He continued:** ‘And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.’*

*Then he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can, ‘Young man, look to Jesus Christ.’*

*There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the Precious Blood of Christ.”*

What must you do to be saved? Believe in Jesus!

**Romans 4:3-5** - *What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>4</sup> Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup> However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

*Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

No one will be saved by being good or religious. You need to believe in Jesus, who died for your sins.

### 3) God brings those who are saved into the diverse family of God

The chapter ends with Paul and Silas meeting with the church that is now meeting at Lydia's house before they leave.

*After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.*

Racially, socially, spiritually, they are very different. But they are now the family of God. The gospel unites across all barriers.

In the days of Jesus, this was a traditional prayer that Jewish men prayed:

**“Blessed are thou King of the Universe who hast not made me a slave, a Gentile, or a woman”.**

In light of that, look at who was added to the church in this chapter: none other than a slave, a Gentile, and a woman. As Paul said:

*Galatians 3:28-29 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

*Colossians 3:11 - Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

Pray for unity in the church. And ask God for His help to be faithful and trusting in suffering, that your witness might lead others to Him.