

The Power of Christ's Reign

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 16:16-40 / February 15, 2026

Introduction:

As we continue in our study of Acts, let's remember something Luke showed in the opening of this letter. Turn with me to Acts 1. Look at verse 1, Note how Luke says he previously dealt with, "all that Jesus began to do and teach." This points to everything recorded in Luke's gospel, the healings of Jesus, His power over the physical and spiritual realms, and the wisdom of His teaching as only the beginning of His ministry, with Acts being the record of what Jesus continued to do and teach. How? Look at verses 4-5. Before ascending to the right hand of the Father, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for Him to baptize them with the Spirit. In verse 8, Jesus describes the result of this, saying, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus continued His ministry through their Spirit empowered witness. In Acts 2, the disciples receive power at Pentecost, witness to Jesus and the church is born. Their empowered witness continued in Jerusalem through Acts 7 and spread to Judea and Samaria from chapters seven through nine. And, in Acts 10-14, their witness turned towards the ends of the earth before the Jerusalem council ensured gospel purity in chapter 15. In all of this, we have seen Jesus continue to do and teach through the Spirit empowered witness of the apostles and other believers. This is the theme of Acts. Why do I mention this? Because the Spirit is the main character and this is important to see for two reasons. First, to keep our focus on the Spirit advancing Christ and His kingdom. Second, to recognize the Spirit's power extends beyond the apostles' lives and ministry. While Acts does serve to confirm the authority of the apostolic witness, it also serves to show how God's Spirit moves through His people. Church, I believe we need more confidence in the Spirit's power today. The bold witness of the early church can be our boldness. How the Spirit guided them is how He may guide us. Christ's healing and saving power on display is still at work through us. How do we know this? Because what we see in Acts are extensions of Christ's reign. He is still reigning and continues to do and teach through His Spirit empowered people today. In our passage, I want to consider two things we see about the power of Christ's reign to increase our faith. First,

Christ's Reign Disrupts Darkness

Notice how Luke sets the stage. Look at verse 16, "As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling." Upon returning to the place of prayer, Luke introduces a slave girl whom we quickly discover is no ordinary slave. Divination is the practice of seeking to uncover hidden knowledge by occult or supernatural means. Luke is indicating her fortune telling abilities came from the spirit of divination. We will come back to this in a moment. Look at verses 17-19, "She followed Paul and us, crying out, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.' And this she kept doing for many days. 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. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers." We might read her words as a positive proclamation, but I'm not persuaded they are. While Jews used the title "Most High God" for Yahweh, Greeks used it for Zeus, and as Richard Longenecker points out, "the announcement of 'salvation'...would have connoted for Gentiles release from the powers governing the fate of man and of the material world" (Richard Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 9: John and Acts, p. 462). This explains why Paul becomes "greatly annoyed," or "deeply troubled." The proclamation was deceptive, designed to confuse the truth of the gospel. But the Holy Spirit, seeing through the deception, reveals the demonic influence to Paul and he is moved to act. Note three things in verses 18-19. First, Paul commands the demon to come out "in the name of Christ," emphasizing Christ's power and reign. Second, Luke says "it came out that very hour," suggesting it took some time. Third, her owners took Paul and Silas to trial because they "saw that their hope of gain was gone."

They were angry because the girl could fortune tell anymore, disrupting their business. This moment not only disrupted the spiritual powers of darkness, it also disrupted the darkness of man's selfish and greedy hearts. Pause to consider an implication of this. Do her abilities sound familiar? Some modern practices of divination are tarot cards, Ouija boards, horoscopes, and palm reading. Church, hear what God says of these things. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 says, "There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord." Zechariah 10:2 says, "the diviners see lies; they tell false dreams and give empty consolation." Divination is not something to entertain. Think about what our passage discloses. Where did the girl's abilities come from? An evil spirit. While God may choose to disclose things through dreams, visions, and prophetic words, that disclosure comes through spiritual gifts in the church. Everything else is the enemy's work. And listen to Paul's warning of things associated with demons in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, "What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons." "Participants" comes from the word "Koinonia," used to speak of our fellowship with Christ. Heed the warning implied from this passage. We may think modern divination practices are harmless, but they are fellowship with demons, opening our lives to their influence. If you are involved in anything like this, turn from it and ask God's Spirit to cleanse your heart and mind from what you have let into your life. I digressed from the point of our passage, but it seemed appropriate to do so. Continue in verses 20-24, "And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, 'These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.' The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." The owners can't punish them for casting out demons, so they appeal to the darkness of a common fear of foreigners and their customs. Does that sound dangerously familiar? As Mrs. Potts says, it's "a tale as old as time." Haman appealed to similar things in Esther, and it continues today for similar despicable acts. Sadly, as in our day, it works. The crowds are instigated and the magistrates give orders to beat Paul and Silas. Then, the jailer continued the brutality by putting them in stocks which would cause their wounds to be torn when they lied down. Look at what happened from one deliverance. Christ's reign disrupted darkness. When it disrupted the spiritual powers of darkness through deliverance, it also disrupted and exposed the darkness of sin. Yet wait for the climax and resolution of this story, because darkness won't have the last laugh. Which brings me to the second thing we see about the power of Christ reign,

Christ's Reign Delivers Peace

Picture Paul and Silas for a moment, bound in stocks with open wounds in a pitch-black prison. Now, look at verse 25, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Pause there. Darkness had not won. Why? Because the peace of Christ reigned. Even in that horrific state, Christ's peace moved them to continually pray and sing to God. Oh family, this is what true peace looks like. Psalm 42:8 says, "By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life." When we understand the steadfast love God commands towards us, it leads to prayerful song. Note what else is happening, "the prisoners were listening." Can you imagine what the prisoners were thinking as Paul and Silas were praying and singing instead of moaning and griping? What a testimony of Christ's peace! Continue in verses 26-29, "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. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped."

But Paul cried with a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.’ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.” God’s power is moving similar to emboldening His people in Acts 4 and freeing Peter in Acts 12. The jailer awakes to the prison doors opened. Assuming they all escaped, he moves to take his own life before hearing Paul say, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” Take this in. We aren’t told how Paul knew his intentions, but we see compassion for the man who fashioned his stocks. Note his reasoning for the jailer to stop, “we are all here.” Don’t read that too quickly. Church, God didn’t just keep Paul and Silas from fleeing, he kept all the prisoners there. That’s power. So, the jailer rushes in and falls down before Paul and Silas trembling in fear. Look at verses 30-34, “Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.” He appears to now understand they serve the real Most High God and do know the way of salvation. So he asks the greatest question of the human heart, “what must I do to be saved?” Has this been the question of your heart? Paul’s answer is the same through all generations, “Believe in Jesus as Lord and you will be saved.” A basic truth that leads to more, as we are told Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord” to the jailer and his household. What did they speak of? They spoke of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross purchasing the forgiveness of sin. That His resurrection confirmed its sufficiency to redeem. And how all who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus are reconciled to God, transferred into the Christ’s kingdom, and receive the Spirit who changes hearts and clothes with power. This is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus today and you will be saved. Now, pay attention to their response in verses 33-34. They quickly moved to care for Paul and Silas, were immediately baptized, fellowshiped together, and rejoiced in their newfound faith. Family, when God redeems you, you find love for His people, desire to obey and be baptized, and rejoice in His grace through faith. Dwell on how things changed for the jailer. He moves from brutality to fear, from fear to peace, and from peace to joy. All because of the Spirit moving through Paul and Silas. Christ’s reign delivers true peace that leads to lasting joy. Let’s cover the ending before bringing all this to a close. Look at verses 35-39 “But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ 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.’ But Paul said to them, ‘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.’ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.” Why does Paul push for a public release? Appealing to his Roman citizenship for a public release would vindicate them to keep the gospel message pure and protect the church in Philippi. Look at verse 40, “So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.” Their first stop was Lydia’s house to encourage the believers with her. The church, made up on Lydia’s household, the freed slave girl, and the jailer’s household needed peace and encouragement as well before moving on. Oh, I wish I was a fly on the wall in that house that day.

Conclusion:

As the worship team comes to lead our time of reflection and response, let’s me suggest one take away from this story,

Know the Power of Christ’s Reign to Disrupt Darkness and Deliver Peace

This story should invigorate our faith. It reveals Christ’s reign over the spiritual forces of evil and the darkness of the human heart. It shows how His peace can dwell in His people. And it relays how that peace helps others find peace.

Family, we live in this same power and peace because the same Spirit dwells within us. As we live in the power of Christ's reign, His Spirit can disrupt the darkness through us, using us to deliver people from demonic influence and the darkness of their hearts. As we live in the power of Christ's reign, His Spirit can give us the same peace in our hardships and use us to deliver His peace to others. Don't settle for a safe and measured experience of Christ's reign. Press into all He has for you. Desire more of His reign over your life. Long for more of His Spirit's power and trust Him to extend His reign through you. Let's pray as we prepare to respond to His Word.