

Sermon Title: **Setting the Captives Free! (A Lesson on *Possession* and *Oppression*)**

Series: Acts- *The Living Tabernacle Jesus is Building*

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Text: Acts 16:16-34

Introduction

“By your endurance you will gain your life.” -[Luke 21:19](#)

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Endurance** here is a very rich word embodying an **upward**, **consistent**, **contagious**, and **outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought into. Last week, our endurance faced a No from God. In these moments our faith can be stretched to new limits; do we trust Jesus? Not just in the beginning of our journey with Him, but in every day that follows. Pressing on, swimming upstream with Him, is the only way the Spirit will lead us!

God said Yes to Macedonia, and the Apostle Paul and his ministry team set sail and hit the European ground with Kingdom endurance. Nothing has gone according to plan; but that is ok with Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. They’ve learned to trust Jesus, learned to trust His Spirit’s leading, and embrace that God’s Kingdom will Come as He Wills!

I. The Difference Between Possession and Oppression (Acts 16:16)

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. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” 18 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. -[Acts 16:16-18](#)

Last time we were in this text, we saw Luke, the author of Acts, focus on the Saving work Jesus was doing upon Lydia and the women who had gathered to pray outside of the city walls of Philippi. Like the account of the Gentile Cornelius coming to faith, along with his house, we find Lydia and her house now a part of the Kingdom. With this saving faith becoming rooted in Europe, we find a confrontation between the Kingdom of Light and that of darkness. Namely, the spiritual warfare we as believers are called to engage in.

We touched lightly on the **possessed** servant girl who had a python spirit and prophesied in ways the town considered themselves blessed by the gods. This was a very lucrative effort for the girl’s owners and stood poised to resource the community with enough direction to keep them happily oppressed by the enemy. I say **oppressed** because there is a difference between **possession** and **oppression**.

The girl was **possessed**, meaning an evil spirit had taken up residence in her body, controlling her. The fruit of this possession is **oppression** for the community influenced by this relationship. The Apostle has been ministering into the community, seeing Jesus’ Kingdom come into Philippi one heart at a time. The chains of oppression were falling from those who once benefited from the girl’s possession. However, a confrontation with the heart of the problem- the girl possessed- is where what we are drawn into with the text.

Can believers be possessed by Satan or any within the demonic realm? Consider Paul's words here,

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.*

*17 Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;*

*then I will welcome you,
18 and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.” -2 Corinthians 6:14-18*

Here Paul pulls from Old Testament text to support the truth there is no room in God's Temple for anything but God. While this is good news for believers in Christ that they cannot be **possessed** by demons, there is strong warning that we can **oppressed** by demons. *How?* When we fail to come out from them, or in other words, come out of the Kingdom of Darkness. In a very real sense, there can be influential strongholds in our lives that strive to slow the pursuit of Jesus and even discourage us from continuing the journey with Him.

In fact, the attraction to return to the former kingdom is so strong the Apostle writes a letter to these same believers years later addressing those who failed to keep in step with the Spirit, swimming upstream after Jesus.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. -Philippians 3:17-21

Paul warns that some who began in Christ have turned back from that which they were saved from. Namely, being drawn back to the oppression the Kingdom of Darkness brings upon them. *The Demonic realm can influence our thoughts, emotions, and actions when we neglect or refuse the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This oppression can take the shape of strongholds.* What I want us to note before moving forward is that although Satan is a defeated enemy, and faith placed in Christ transfers us into His Kingdom of Light, the enemy continues to wage warfare against us and the efforts of Jesus in our lives, our marriages, our families, and our communities.

So, what are we called in Him to do about it?

II. Binding the Strong Man (Mark 3:23-27)

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” 23 And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot

stand, but is coming to an end. 27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. -[Mark 3:23-27](#)

In this parable Jesus prepares His Twelve Disciples, the Seventy, and then the early church onward into our lives today for the work of Gospel Ministry with a focus on what we are up against. Ministry since Jesus' time would be different than what it had been before. In the Old Testament God's people were up against the fruit of the enemy- namely idols and those submitting to them. While in and of themselves idols are lifeless, there is a spiritual force through the window of what they are that before Christ, God's Spirit had not indwelt people to combat. Now since Christ, we are resourced to take the fight to where it is truly at. *Everything we are and have, along with all that we are called into is all about Jesus!*

"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

*18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." -[Luke 4:14-19](#)*

I want us to note (as did Luke) the three stages Jesus presents within this parable.

1. **Entering the Enemies Territory.** Understand dear saints, the moment we call unto Jesus for Salvation we have declared war against the enemy of our souls. To Name Jesus' Name in any situation or circumstance is affirming this declaration, whether we realize it or not. To be a part of God's purposes, a part of His Kingdom coming into this world we face a very real enemy and threat.

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. [1 John 5:19](#)

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. -[John 12:31](#)

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. -[John 15:19](#)

2. **Binding and Loosening.** A few weeks back we talked about spiritual strongholds- these are areas of life that are either places of *possession* or *oppression* in the lives of those we minister into. Jesus said we are to bind the strongman. In this parable that would be the devil. *But how?* Through prayer and God's Word.

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed[a] in heaven." -[Matthew 16:19](#)

"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed[a] in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will

be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” -[Matthew 18:18-20](#)

3. **Liberating what was possessed and oppressed.** When the enemy is bound, and cast out, what was either possessed or oppressed can experience liberation.

*“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”
-[Romans 16:20](#)*

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” -[Hebrews 2:14-15](#)

This parable stands as a battle plan regarding the work of God’s Kingdom. While some accused Jesus of being in alignment with the enemy, and simply stirring insurrection by getting the enemy to turn of himself, Jesus affirms this is not something happening from within the Kingdom of Darkness. **No, God’s Kingdom is coming by force into this world and driving out the Kingdom of Darkness- it is Spirit filled, resourced, led, and victorious- all in Jesus’ Name!**

III. In the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:17-18)

“She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” 18 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. -[Acts 16:17-18](#)

Next, I want to draw our attention to the witness of the demon possessed girl and the Apostle Paul and ministry team.

El Elyon. This is the Hebrew Title or Name for God meaning *the Most High God* or *the Absolutely Sovereign God*. It was one of the names used to associate God’s presence and purpose for the Nation of Israel. There is an idea, a sort of Jewish mysticism, that when you cite a particular name of God in a particular situation you can unlock blessings that would otherwise be denied.

While on the surface this effort of the demon may seem innocent or even helpful, there is a major shift about to take place. This is of great note and value for us today. As a Pastor I get asked if I’ve read this or that from noted Jewish authors who are bringing a fresh insight to a text that will unlock something of God for us today. While we welcome healthy teaching that is Spirit led, we must be mindful that we are not dumpster diving instead of eating at the King’s table.

Hear me- praying Old Testament Names of God will not unlock anything for you. These Names are beautiful and invitations to know our God. But there is a Name above all Names that we must be the most acquainted with.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits[a] of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority” -[Colossians 2:8-10](#)

In the Name of Jesus Christ. Paul’s preaching has been declarations of war within the enemy’s territory. He now turns and binds the demonic enemy and as a result liberation comes forth. *And it is all done in Jesus’ Name!*

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **-Philippians 2:9-11***

With the possession ended, the source of the spiritual oppression was greatly weakened and as a result the towns liberation turned into the Apostle's captivity!

IV. He Set the Prisoners Free (Acts 16:25-34)

*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, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer[a] called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they 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 washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 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. **-Acts 16:25-34***

The enemy takes swift revenge against the Apostle's, yet even in their incarceration they lift their voice and sing of the freedom that is theirs in Jesus Christ! I always marvel at the strength of saints to raise a Hallelujah in all of the seasons of life- the calm and welcoming as well as the stormy and unsettling. What we have in Christ is truly not sourced from this world, but in the one which is coming. Our true home.

The prisoners were listening! Oh, dear saint, do not neglect to consider the work the Spirit is doing through the turmoil that may come upon us. Remember Jesus' words,

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" 18 And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

-Luke 10:17-20

As this was happening, a great earthquake shook loose the prisoners from their bondage.

*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" **-Matthew 27:51-54***

Jesus is showing the physical fruit of what happened in the Spiritual realm in Philippi. As the demonic possession was bound and cast out, the oppression weakened affording liberation. As the Apostles were in prison, Jesus brought an earthquake that shook loose the bondage affording liberation. In this beautiful Gospel illustration, the Jailor and his household have come to place faith in Jesus- God's Kingdom grows!

V. Kingdom Application for Us Today

As we have noted, as believers we are filled with the Spirit of God by faith in Jesus Christ. We have been transitioned from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light. In this we rightly rejoice!

Yet, while this prevents our possession of the enemy, it does not prevent his oppressive efforts upon our lives. If we resist the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our lives, neglect the feeding from God's Word, neglect prayer and fasting, disregard the gathering among saints- we stand in danger of being swept back into the appetites we once possessed as slaves of the former master.

In this we allow the enemy who was bound to come back in greater strength to bind us and pillage our marriages, families, and communities!

How are we to move forward in Kingdom Stride?

Today- it begins with declaration. Cry unto Jesus for Spiritual renewal- cry for strongholds to crumble, repent of the entanglements of life in this world, lift up and declare the authority of Jesus' Name over every part of our lives and ministry.

Then, this week take time to navigate each of the following Kingdom Keys for your life. Remember, God desires to do a work in you before He does a work through you! Make sure you have our **Cornerstone Chapel App**, I will be posting lessons going deeper with you over the following:

- **MONDAY** Recognize our True Fight (Ephesians 6:12)
- **TUESDAY** Renew Commitment to God and His Word (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 6:14)
- **WEDNESDAY** Have Faith in the Victory of Christ in and through your life (Ephesians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:8)
- **THURSDAY** Boldly proclaim Christ and His Kingdom in His Spirit (Luke 1:15-17; Acts 1:8, 2:4; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 6:15)
- **FRIDAY** Taking the battle to the enemy and his strongholds (Acts 16:16-18)
 - Use God's Word (Ephesians 6:17)
 - Pray in the Spirit (Acts 6:4; Ephesians 6:18)
 - Fasting (Matthew 6:16)
 - Deliverance (Matthew 10:1)



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