

Sermon Title: **Pursuing Kingdom Opportunities**

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

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

Text: Acts 16:11-24

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. We’re not in Kansas anymore! (Church Planting in Philippi) (Acts 16:11-15)

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the^d district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. -Acts 16:11-12

A. Not the First Choice of Cities to Evangelize.

Philippi was a “Rome away from Rome” referred to as a *colony*. This was unique as only three other cities bear this title or association; they were able to function autonomously. Philippi originally was a place veteran Roman soldiers would retire to, leaving the commotion of life they once served in for the quiet agricultural regions Europe afforded. Over time the Roman presence would increase to such a degree that most of the people in this Macedonian region would be Roman citizen by birth yet have never been to Rome or lived in more dominant Roman regions.

The gulf dividing the rich and poor was very wide and deep; the believers who would become the church of Philippi would endure hardships unique to poverty. Of greater interest is the dominance of Latin over Greek here. For the Apostle and his team, this may provide some linguistic challenges for them and help us understand some of the unique points Luke notes in this chapter.

¹³ *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. -Acts 16:13*

B. Not the Traditional way of doing things.

We're not in Kansas anymore! This sentiment would capture their thoughts as they process the landscape of Philippi. What was common of the Ministry of the Gospel up to this point was to locate Synagogue's and share the Good News of Jesus during their Sabbath readings. Why? Because they would show how Jesus fulfills the writings of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets. However, there were no Synagogue's in Philippi or the near surrounding areas.

In some areas as the number of believers would grow, entrance into the cities themselves to gather in worship would be welcomed. However, with those that were smaller and different than what was chiefly practiced would have to congregate outside of the city walls, or the gate leading into the city. Paul recognizes this and so on the Sabbath he and his team go outside of the gate to look for the harvest the Spirit has prepared for Kingdom Growth.

Were there Jewish settlers here in Philippi? Yes; although they would not have been treated or respected by the Jewish communities for taking up residence in a place where there was not a synagogue. This also may contribute to the reason they did not have a Synagogue; they were few in number. *Paul's assumption though- if there are Jews here they will gather to worship together in prayer on the Sabbath.* And he would find them outside of the city gate.

C. Not the Traditional Converts.

¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. -Acts 16:14-15

Why what Luke notes about the beginning of this church is fascinating: The first converts were women.

Macedonia was a *Gender Progressive Region* within the Roman Empire. Women were often the means of new thought and practice coming into Roman homes due to women having little freedom (and obligation) amidst dominant religious cults in Rome. They had the freedom to listen to, observe and learn from, as well as reason through beyond what their father, spouse, other male dominant figures would have. On the flip side of this, we see that this ability to bring God's Kingdom in was also a concern that this same avenue would allow the enemy to creep in.

For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. -2 Timothy 3:6-7

Please understand, the direction Luke is taking the narrative, along with a greater understanding of the context behind the Letters that make up our New Testament, much- *including the role of Women-* was mirroring a context that existed beyond the words employed in the Biblical Text. The Holy Spirit is not just the author of the text, He is the leading force in Paul and his team, as well as the one empowering and gifting men and women through Faith in Jesus Christ. If there is conflict in our understanding, and application, I want to encourage you to hit pause and watch what the Spirit is doing here.

Paul goes and speaks to a group of women who had gathered for such a purpose. Among this group of women was Lydia from Thyatira. Luke notes her profession and faith. Most people did not live in Philippi except the wealthy; the rest lived in neighboring towns and gathered to Philippi for commerce and community engagement. Lydia was most likely a free Roman, of Gentile heritage, and a business leader / manager.

Jesus Himself opens Lydia's heart to pay attention to what Paul is saying. In the **Greek**, opening the heart is *removing or tearing down what was in place that causes someone not to see with understanding*. **Paying attention** in the Greek, implies the action of drawing near, like a ship sailing into its destined harbor. *In other words, Jesus was drawing Lydia closer to Himself through the Kingdom witness of Paul!*

This is an encouraging reminder for us today as we witness in both declaration and demonstration of the Gospel- it is not our ability, our words, or our passion but the Lord Jesus alone in His Spirit that the eyes of our understanding are opened to Him.

Note Paul's words in his letter to the Ephesian believers,

*For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love[ff] toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. **-Ephesians 1:15-23***

This work Paul celebrates of Jesus opening the eyes of our understanding is one that he labors in intercession is a *progressive* opening that matures as we *continually* swim upstream with Him. As a seller of purple- a color associated with royalty, wealth, and privilege- Lydia would meet the true king her heart has been longing for- Jesus!

Why the Gospel was dangerous (Note Acts 16:20-21)

Another note I want to address with the Greek term *dianoigo*, is that it is a term used to describe the opening of the womb of the male first born, with legal attachment to first born rights. Luke notes this with purpose, for all who place faith in Jesus share in His Firstborn status of God the Father (Christ as Head of His Body- the Church) and stand to co-inherit with Him!

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

*21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. **-Colossians 1:15-23***

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of

God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

-Romans 8:14-17

The use of the term “sons” is not one that is meant to absolve ones gender, but to legally incorporate male *and* female into this covenantal place we have before God through Christ.

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. -Galatians

3:25-29

Coming back to our text, Lydia’s conversion is going to mirror another powerful conversion that shook the understanding on how Jesus was going to bring His Kingdom- that of Cornelius. *Lydia was baptized with her household.* Without the mention of a husband, it can be understood that Lydia is either a widowed, divorced, or never married woman. According to Roman Law, if widowed she could only retain 10% of the family’s wealth if she was free born and had a minimum of four children. If she was divorced, she could still reclaim her dowry and return to live within the standing of her biological family if the cause for divorce did not disqualify her morally (remember we are talking Roman Law and Custom; not the Law of Moses). If never married, there is a chance, if a free born woman, she could inherit from her father if no son was present to inherit and carry on.

It is most likely Lydia was divorced or never married. The absence of Luke detailing this may be in part due to the audience’s sensitivity. (This almost echoes Jesus’ conversation with a Samaritan woman beside a well) That aside, the rest of Luke’s text makes sense when we see the response of the crowd for what happens later.

This may also show why Judaism / the Law / Synagogues were not present and / or prevalent. **In a progressive culture, a religion that practices defining people by their sin has little welcome.** But this is what makes the Gospel cross cultural- In Christ a person is not defined by sin but God’s redeeming power. Lydia may have been divorced; however Jesus sees a woman He is about to both redeem and use to bring His Kingdom to Europe.

If you have judged me faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. In other words, if you believe the Gospel you are sharing, and if your Lord is now our Lord, will you and your team receive my invitation of hospitality? Cornelius did the same (See Acts 10:48). ***Prevailed upon us,*** Luke means that her appeal was forceful in that it was not the expected custom probably due to her status of singleness (widowed / divorced / singlehood). *However, with the plurality of Paul and his team, along with other members of her household (family and servants), it is rightfully assumed they did not subject themselves to sin or sinful temptation.*

The manner of this unfolding of events still mirrors the Ministry of Christ and how He taught His Disciples to do ministry in the towns the Spirit would lead them in to.

And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ -Luke 10:7-9

Lydia and her household were the first of the converts in this Philippi region; and her home would become the first of churches in a region that would soon be experiencing a greater wave of God’s Kingdom coming- *one heart at a time!*

II. At the Name of Jesus (Acts 16:16-24)

A. Deliverance: At the Name of Jesus (Acts 16:16-18)

*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***

Paul and his team would continue to meet with those gathering outside of the Philippi Gate for prayer and worship, sharing the Good news of God's Kingdom coming- a message of both declaration and demonstration. Healing was the direction Jesus gave His followers if they were received, and deliverance is a part of this Kingdom Ministry. It was for Jesus. It was for His Apostles. It is for His Church today. *And it will be until He Returns, and His Kingdom is fully here!*

This unnamed woman had a spirit of divination upon her. This term in the Greek is python which is rooted in Greek mythology. It was a Pythian serpent or dragon said to guard the oracle of Delphi until slain by Apollo. The demonic spirit of the Pythian serpent was a title given to women who practiced divination; symbolically serving as priestess to Apollos. Having such a priestess was a lucrative possession and would explain why the Apostles would not have immediately gained ground preaching inside the walls of Philippi.

Why was Paul getting annoyed if she was prophesying truth about them? It's about source. Jesus rebuked demonic voices for the same thing.

*Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. **-Luke 4:40-41***

Only a Spirit filled witness can lead to Jesus, and empower to continue the course of following Jesus. Demons may attest to Him, but when trust is gained and they are invited in, will lead to the destruction they are destined for. **Remember, the Holy Spirit leads us upward into God's Kingdom as the demonic spiritual forces of evil / darkness are cast out.**

The sense of Paul's annoyance notes that he is also hesitant to address her. Why? Probably because he knew what would happen. **Persecution**. It's like one of those moments when you normally lose it when someone says something or does something and you have that friend (or spouse) that warns, *don't do it!* Up to this point, there has not been any noted resistance to the Kingdom witness happening.

After many days of this, enough is enough and Paul turns, addressing the spirit directly and commands it to come out of her by the Name of Jesus Christ. Note, Paul does not pray first. He turns and rebukes this demon. And by Jesus' Name, it is gone. Very hour means in that same moment.

*And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." **-Mark 16:15-18***

As did Jesus, so does His Apostles.

B. Persecution- At the Name of Jesus (Acts 16:19-24)

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. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. -Acts 16:19-24

When the pocketbook gets hit; cost gets real. Now the Gospel Witness goes into the city of Philippi, but not in the pleasant way. For whatever reason, only Paul and Silas are grabbed and drug into the city and thrown down in the marketplace before the rulers.

Note the charge. *Disturbing* (confusing) our city. *Advocating* (proclaiming) customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice. This reveals to us the impact their Gospel witness was having. Paul and his team were engaging and actively proclaiming Jesus- declaration and demonstration- and it was a witness gaining momentum in the city.

At the energy of the crowd, the magistrates respond. Magistrates were employed by Rome to provide civil stability. A Roman Colony would have two appointed for their city. This uproar was so intense they act to immediately rectify and satisfy to get things back on track. *And judging by such a reaction, it's easier to understand why people chose to meet outside the city to pray!* Paul would look back on this moment and note,

But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. -1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul and Silas are stripped, beaten, and finally thrown into prison. This was a very public response to God's Ambassadors for all that was done in Jesus' Name. Humiliated, sore, and now feet in stocks, the cost for following Jesus is felt deeply and personally. I wonder if Silas looked over at Paul and said, *you just had to cast that demon out?*

Going Deeper Questions for Application

1. What stood out to you about this message and why?
2. *What was unique about Philippi? Why did Paul and his team go outside the gate on the Sabbath? Who made up Paul's team?*
3. Who is Lydia and who opened her heart to respond to the Gospel?
4. *Why was and is the Gospel so dangerous (according to today's message- note the Scripture provided in Sermon outline)?*
5. What two things happened at the Name of Jesus? Describe the Deliverance and the Persecution.
6. *While the ministry in Europe was different than Jerusalem, Judea, Galatia- was the ministry in Philippi still following the design of Jesus? How or how not?*
7. How is this message going to impact you and your pursuit of Jesus?