



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

Introduction

Paul planted the church at Philippi on his second missionary journey (see map). As you will see, Paul had a special place in his heart for the Philippian church. He has nothing critical to say about this church and was pleased with their spiritual growth and their generosity. Paul was in a Roman prison when he wrote this letter. [The imprisonment resulted from his appeal to Rome detailed in Acts 25-28.] When the Philippian believers heard that Paul was in prison, they sent Epaphroditus, probably the church pastor, to minister to Paul and share a financial contribution from the church. This letter in effect was a thank you letter to the church, written in late AD 61 or early AD 62.

Philippi was a Roman colony (see Acts 16:12). After the battle of Philippi in 42 BC, Marc Antony settled army veterans there. In 30 BC Octavian (Julius Caesar's adopted son, later called Caesar Augustus) forced some Romans from Italy to settle there as well. Citizens of Philippi enjoyed the full rights of Roman citizenship. Philippi's legal and judicial systems were Roman, and Latin was the official language of civic rule. The Via Egnatia, an important Roman commercial road linking Italy with the east, passed through Philippi.

The Planting of the Philippian Church, Acts 16:6-40

Paul headed to Macedonia because the Spirit had prevented him from preaching the Gospel in Asia. Paul's plans were interrupted by the Spirit, with the only acceptable response—obedience.

The Gospel had invaded Europe!

Philippi was the principal city of Macedonia and a Roman colony. It was also the home of the worship of many gods. It had an autonomous government, freedom from tribute and taxation, and legal ownership rights similar to those in Italy. It was a "little Rome." The Jewish presence was relatively small.

Converts at Philippi:

- Lydia: After several days, Paul and his group intentionally went to the Gangites riverside, where a group of Jewish women (and converts to Judaism) were worshipping and praying on the Sabbath (at a synagogue there?). They met Lydia, a worker of "purple goods," someone who worked in fine clothes for the wealthy. She was probably a convert to Judaism. The text states that "the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." [The tension

between divine sovereignty and human responsible freedom is evident in this verse.] Lydia trusted Christ, was baptized and her home became the first house church in Philippi. [16:13-15]

- A Demon-Possessed Girl: Next Paul encountered a slave girl with a spirit of divination who harassed Paul by announcing his proclamation in a manner that disturbed him. [16:16-18] This woman is portrayed as inspired by the Pythonian god, Apollo, as a soothsayer—a lucrative religious practice in this period. She was continually crying out that Paul and his colleagues served “the Most High God,” a phrase polytheistic Greco-Roman people used to refer to God as a great one—the greatest among many. Paul then exorcised the demon, liberating the woman from the abuse of her masters.

The girl’s masters were not happy and brought Paul and Silas into the marketplace (*agora*) before the magistrates with two charges: [1] They were disturbing the city; and [2] They were promoting a foreign religious cult not recognized by Rome. They also stressed that they were Jews. The magistrates then ordered them beaten with the rods of the Roman *fascēs*; they were then placed in prison and fastened to wooden stocks that were tight and painful. [16:19-24; Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. There was no due process for them and they were beaten with rods; Roman citizens were not to be so beaten.]

- A Roman Jailer: As Paul and Silas were singing hymns and praising God, God sent an earthquake, thereby opening the prison doors and freeing the prisoners from their stocks. When the jailer awakened, he was terrified, for the Roman penalty for escaped prisoners was death. By proclaiming their presence, Paul stopped him from taking his life. The earthquake had presented the jailer with irrefutable evidence that God was at work in Paul’s group, exclaiming “what must I do to be saved?” He believed, and, filled with gratitude, washed their wounds from the earlier beating. His household was also baptized. He then took them home and fed them. Those who were enemies are now brought together as members of the family of God! [16:25-34]

The reaction of the Philippian magistrates to all this was fascinating. They decided to let Paul and Silas go and sent the police to inform Paul and Silas that they were free to go. Shrewdly, Paul then informed them that he and Silas were Roman citizens. Paul therefore refused to go free, given that as a Roman citizen he had been beaten without a formal charge being proved against him and without a formal hearing. He wished to make his innocence a matter of public record to those in charge and to be publically escorted out of prison, an act showing his innocence. Paul’s public release constituted an added element of protection for the local church community; the magistrates would be more careful in the future. The magistrates came to the prison, appealed to them (or appeased them) and asked them to leave the city. They make a final visit to Lydia (and the house church there) and left Philippi.

The three people who came to faith at Philippi were diverse ethnically, socially, psychologically, and culturally. The Gospel is for all people in all social and economic categories. Furthermore, with Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer, we see the profound change that the Gospel brings—not only to individual people, but also to the culture around them. If the way in which people lead their lives is changed by the Gospel, the

culture around them changes as well. Personal transformation eventually produces cultural transformation.

Questions:

- A clear lesson from this passage is that cultural transformation results from individual transformation by the Gospel. How does this premise affect your view of the importance of the Gospel for the transformation of American culture? Will such transformation come via politics? Via the next candidate for president? How does this premise affect your view of being the salt and light of Jesus?
- Ponder the statement in 16:15 of Lydia, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” What does this say about God’s role in personal evangelism? Paul was faithful in his proclamation, but success in terms of converts was a result of the Lord’s work as well. [The tension between divine sovereignty and responsible human freedom]
- In this passage, we see people coming to Christ, but we also see deep opposition to the Gospel. Should we expect anything different today?

In Him,

Dr. Jim Eckman