

The Capture of Paul
Acts 16:16-24

We've been studying the story of the early church, the growth of the church, in the book of Acts, and we're in Acts 16, and I think our section today is verses 16-24. We're in the middle now of the second missionary journey. The gospel has gone from Judea, Samaria, throughout, now the Middle East, and the first missionary journey that Paul took with Silas, really, focused on what is modern-day Turkey (used to be called Asia Minor). The middle area of this is Galatia where Paul, to this point, has written the book of Galatians after he took the first missionary journey. This is, like, in about 50 A D that he came back from the first missionary journey, and in the winter, wrote the book of Galatians in 51. In spring, he desired to go visit those churches, again, that he established. So, he set out to visit them, and along the way, he picked up Timothy in Lystra, one of the churches that he had founded and then encountered a vision of a man from Macedonia which said to him come to Macedonia and minister, help us. Macedonia is in the northern part of Greece which is where he ends up in Philippi. He lands in Philippi because he's picked up in Troas on the far western coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He picked up Luke. We know that from Luke Acts 16:10 where the pronouns change from a "they" to a "we." And Luke, the author of Acts, then, is including himself along on this trip, and most likely, that Luke was familiar with Philippi, which is why they ended up in Philippi which is near the coast of Macedonia and the Aegean Sea.

And in Philippi, they encounter a lady named Lydia, a women who is from Thyatira which is on the western part of modern-day Turkey (Asia Minor), but she had immigrated to Philippi because she was a seller of purple fabric - a wealthy person, an importer, had conducted a business in this, was well-to-do, had a house that, when she believed in Christ, was able to invite this group of people that had traveled to Philippi which now had consisted of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke to stay with her; and her household was baptized. So, that brings us to where we are in Philippi, and the story that now takes place where there's a salvation of a jailor, of a Roman jailor, in the city of Philippi. This is covering several verses, 16 all the way to 40, but we we're not going to have enough time to deal with all that, so what I did was divide this up into time frames. So, we're going to look just today at how Paul ended up in this jail in Philippi. And then there's some time that passes, and in the night, he is freed, and this jailor becomes a believer, and

then, finally, there's the next day, and then the aftermath of that. So, this is kind of the three sections we're going to divide this up into.

Today, we're just going to look at that first section. So, let's read together in verse 16; "It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, 'These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.' She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!' And it came out at that very moment. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.' The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." And that's where we'll stop.

So, we have this encounter with this slave girl, this person, doing the bidding of her masters, and she had certain abilities and they encounter her at a "...place of prayer..." In verse 16, "It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us..." So, recall that this "...place of prayer..." was where the meeting of the Jewish women were. In verse 13, we find them having met by the Gangites River that is still flowing today, and that they would meet there because they had an ability for the ceremonial washings to be done by this river, and they continued to meet there because they didn't have a synagogue. There wasn't enough Jews in Philippi to have a synagogue. This is where they met, and it was just women that Paul encountered in verse 13. So, when he went back there, they encountered "...a slave-girl having a spirit of divination..." So, we need to take a moment, you know, and look at this. One of the great things about kind of just marching through the Scriptures and learning what each verse

says as we go along is that we are sort of then forced to look at what's being said, as opposed to just coming up with things to talk about.

In this day and age, you may have some awareness of the topic of evil spirits, the casting out of evil spirits. That sort of stuff got a little more traction, more noticed. Well, I think there's an ebb and flow of this. You know, as years go by, sometimes there's more interest in this, sometimes there's less. Now, there's a little more. You can pretty much always find news stories that are about something or other that has happened in relation to something like this. I think there's a bit of an uptick in the Catholic church. With the Pope that now is leading the church - is little bit more mystical than the last Pope was, who was a little more academic. And they do classes on exorcism, and they have lots of priests (they can't accommodate all of them) that want to take these classes and this sort of stuff. On top of that, you get stories of anecdotal things about what people say has happened. Very rarely do you find people really talking about what the Scriptures says about it, and when they do talk about what the Scripture says about this stuff, then you kind of get proof testing. You're cherry-picking verses that will support what they think as they build this construct of ideas about what is supposedly happening in exorcisms and what things get built upon speculations and conjecture, and off you go. There is going to be a lot about this, but this is just going to look at what is happened here, and I think that we'll be guided in the truth as we'll just give a little attention to what the Scripture has to say.

You know, one of the things that it's useful to note here is there's the phrase here, "...having a spirit of divination..." and most Bibles kind of say that. When you kind of get an "of," you have to then understand what the "of" might be speaking of. There's different ways to know whether it's "a cause of," or "an effect of," or what the meaning of that is. The New International Version (as it often does) tries to help us a little bit with the understanding. I think they do a pretty good job where they say, "...a spirit by which she predicted the future." ...which just basically describes this, here - this ability to predict the future or a spirit of divination. It's not, like, that we have, like, the special spirit that does fortune telling, and then we have the special spirit that addicts you to cigarettes, and the special spirit that makes you stub your toe, and the special spirit that gives you lung cancer. You know, we don't quite see any of that in the Scripture. That's what people sort of conjecture about and want to put forth that, oh, he's got the spirit of this. So, "...the

spirit of divination...,” actually, is not the direct translation of the Greek. It’s just an attempt to try to describe that this is a spirit that enabled this girl to predict the future, and that’s a very desirable thing for people to want to know.

People want to know what the future is. Especially, like, as we head into a new year, people want to know what’s going to happen next year, and if you only knew what’s going to happen next year... You know that there’s going to be things that are going to happen next year that are not going to be so good and things that are going to be good, and if you knew exactly what that was then you could prepare better, then maybe put your money in better places, or all that stuff. And the same way it is today, so it was two thousand years ago. People had great interest in knowing of what’s coming up, and this evil spirit enabled them to have some sense of this. This “... spirit of divination ...” is literally translated (if you’re just going to do a literal translation), it’s “python spirit” which probably doesn’t help you out enough right there. But you go, what does that mean? You know, and this is why it doesn’t really get translated for you because it kind of is somewhat meaningless without some background to it. The best I can kind of say is, as a comparison, it would be like if somebody today would say he’s a Dodger fan. Well, if we forward the clock two thousand years from now, and somebody were to read that somebody said somebody’s a Dodger fan, they might be really confused, and they could say what does that mean? He dodges things? And then, they could go look up that, yeah, in the 1800’s, people were dodging trollies, and now you know why it was the Brooklyn Dodgers. But when we say Dodger fan, we all know what we mean by that because there’s a baseball team that is... mascot is the Dodgers.

In kind of the same way, the python was the mascot, if you will, of Apollo. Now, the Greek god thing was like a really, really, big deal back then, and you know, you even know of Apollo. You know, you’ve heard of the Greek god Apollo. That gives you a clue that this god stuff that they had going on then was really, really, all that. They were, really, up into the whole thing, and so the python was representative of the Greek god Apollo. It’s like his mascot. You know, it’s what people connected with that Greek god who is said to have slayed a python that guarded the oracle of Delphi. And you think, what is the oracle of Delphi? So, I have a picture of what the oracle of Delphi is. This is this place, about eight or so miles as the crow flies, south of Philippi, that for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years had

people, priestesses (actually, they were called Pythia), who would be giving predictions of the future that people considered to be very valuable. In fact, some of these people that considered this very valuable were rulers, emperors, people going off to war, you know, where to attack, all this stuff. Just like today, there's a kind of a desire for people to know what's going to happen. There's a desire to know what's going to happen back then, and there was this place where people told people what was going to happen, and that was connected to the god Apollo.

Okay, so what does this have to do with anything? Well, this should kind of give us an orientation that what we have going on here is this evil spirit that is not connected to snakes, nor is it connected to particular fortune-telling per se. It is connected to the Greek religion that opposed the truth. So, this slave-girl was having an evil spirit that had been afflicting her and this affliction had enabled her to communicate something about the future. Now, I'm sure it wasn't, like, completely accurate because one of the tests of a prophet is you're, actually, completely accurate. Well, I don't think she was completely accurate, but she was useful to her masters in bring them money. And to also help you about this affliction thing is (and I have it in your notes - I reference Luke 7:21) there's many places, actually, in the Gospels that give kind of a setting for evil spirits and a list of things. And I'll just give you one of these. In Luke 7:21, we see evil spirits as part of a series of afflictions, which says, "At that very time He [Jesus] cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind." And this kind of helps us to see that these evil spirits are not something that somebody, like, gets because they were so evil, because they were so rebellious or they just have these habits; it's come upon people as, like, an affliction, and Jesus cured people of this. Like, you know, people got diseases not because they were uniquely evil and sinful, but because we live in a fallen world, and "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." (1 John 5:19).

So, with that, evil spirits exist. They don't appear to manifest themselves all in the same way at this point, as they did back then because there wasn't the conflict between Jesus on earth, the apostles with revelation of God, and the forces of darkness back then that was going on. We don't have the same situation today. We have now a settled revelation in the word of God, and the challenge that we have with evil spirits isn't dealt with by casting them out because we have no instructions for us in the New Testament that we

should be casting out demons, any more than we are healing people and raising people from the dead and conducting miracles. This is something that is testifying to the revelation that these men, these apostles, were communicating, in giving them a special place, as saying these men are from God.

So, with that, and as we continue on with this story, we find the phrasing of what this woman was saying, and how she was saying it. And it's a little interesting to think of why this kind of took so long, and why Paul puts up with it. Well, the reason is because there's a "Following after..." that is a compound word that indicates some distance between the girl and Paul. This is why it took days, many days, because the girl wasn't, like, right by him - that would be really annoying. It was more off in the distance, and in the distance, she was screaming, yelling, crying out (depends on what your translation says), and this is why this could be delayed for a bit because it wasn't right by him and why she needed to scream and yell. This phrasing that she's yelling is interesting. Verse 17; "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." ...kind of sounds pretty right on, doesn't it? Almost seems like she's helping them out, that she's testifying to the truthfulness of what they're saying and the God that they represent.

And the phrase "...the Most High God..." that's a Biblical phrase. We saw it not long ago when Dale's teaching in Hebrew 7:1. It's a phrase that is used there. It's used often in the Old Testament, "...the Most High God..." It's a Biblical phrase referring to the one and only God, but what would her hearers understand? Remember this Greek religion didn't have one God. It had many Gods, so what "...the Most High God..." would've meant to them, would have been understood by the Greeks, as simply a god that was higher than the other gods, of the many gods. There's a most high god, not the only God, the one God, but just the best god. So, even in the salvation thing, you know, would they understand salvation, even as the way, the only way? It was much more confusing than it seems on face value with the understanding you have. This is just an example of how it goes with other religions. This is an example of using Biblical words to confuse biblical truths and just because people use Biblical words doesn't mean they're communicating Biblical truth.

In fact, some of the most challenging people for the ministry of Jesus Christ today is not the people that are not using Biblical words; it's the people that are using Biblical words because you give enough truth that there's an essence of, okay, you're actually connected to truth when you're, really, not because they're convoluting truth, and they're using phrasing that is not from the truth. They're meaning of what they're teaching does not comport with the teaching of the Bible, but if they use Biblical phrasing, then you can get sucked into thinking that that is the truth. So, that's why we have to be careful. That's why we have to study what the word of God really says and not just look at words, and that's why this challenge that we have of the forces of darkness confusing the truth of Christ is challenging for us. Now, there's a really odd thing that is unexpected as you read this and that is why Paul cast out the evil spirit. You would kind of think, oh, he's able to cast out evil spirits. What a wonderful thing! But why did it take him so many days? Unless you want to suppose he couldn't do it earlier, which I don't think you can think because it wasn't like, oh, he needed to get together the ability or take a class or something like that. That wasn't the trigger.

What was the trigger? He became annoyed. He became annoyed. So, why is it that he finally gets around to casting out this spirit after he gets annoyed? That doesn't sound like a very high and lofty motive, does it? Well, obviously, this ministry of casting out evil spirits is not his primary ministry or he would've showed up at Philippi and started getting to work with it. He didn't seem to have much of an interest in this. He let it kind of go for many days. Why? Because his primary focus was what was going to really deliver them, and what was going to really deliver them was the gospel of Jesus Christ: know who Jesus was, to believe in Him, follow Him, and be delivered from darkness and brought into the kingdom of light and have eternal life and live forever with God, be forgiven of sin, be free from all this suffering that sin brings us and know that we'll one day be with God, eternally. That delivers people. Freeing them from an evil spirit doesn't deliver them any more than healing someone of a disease delivers them. Oh, the temporary benefit, but it doesn't bring any permanent solution to their lot in life. Paul had another mission, a different mission. So, he's not annoyed like you and I are annoyed – like, I'm annoyed, like there's a fly buzzing around me, and, finally, I'm fed up. I go get a flyswatter. Or, I'm driving in town, right? And I'm stuck at a red light, and I don't like to be stuck at red lights. So, I figured out where all the lights are and how they are timed, and so I can go the fastest way where I want to go. And then they change the

lights on me, and then, I'm stuck, and I have to go figure out another route. That's my kind of annoyance; that's not Paul.

What Paul was annoyed at was more about being disturbed. That's another way to translate annoyed is being disturbed by the effect the demon was having upon the ministry, rather than any personal impatience on his part, and this had an effect on ministry. Don't you think... there's someone over here yelling, "Listen to Gerry, he's telling them the truth." You know, no thanks. I don't need the help. This is an impediment to communication. This is not helping Paul. So, at some point after many days, for the sake of his ministry to the Philippians, he cast out this demon. This is not some, like, crafted phrasing that gets it done, like, the key that unpicks the lock, but he says, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" You know, identifying Jesus Christ as the one that has authority over the evil spirits, the darkness. "And it came out of her that very moment." ...didn't take a while, wasn't a recovery period or anything like that. So, waiting many days, casting out the demon, likely came because he was aware of the consequences, and I suspect that he knew that this was quite the enterprise, this fortune-telling slave-girl, and knew that there would be some opposition that might come his way when the masters would no longer get to benefit financially from this endeavor. So, I suspect that's added to the reluctance to do something until it got to the point of affecting ministry. So, at that point, for the sake of the ministry, he acted even to his own jeopardy.

And we have this story of why evil spirits are really a problem, and that is, who are the people who are with us on this trip? Luke, Silas, Paul, another person Timothy. So, we find a letter, the letter of 1 Corinthians, that Paul wrote to Timothy that helps us out with this. 1 Timothy 4; Paul wrote, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods..." all this extra stuff that the Scripture doesn't say. And there's a solution to this attempt that demons are trying to confuse the truth with, and the solution for this is in 1 Timothy 4. So, evil spirits - they serve to confuse the teaching of the word of God. That is their mission. It's beyond just afflicting people; it's to thwart the ministry of the Lord.

So, while Paul casts out the demon in this instance, he is instructing us to oppose the deceitful spirits to the instruction of the word of God, and you can just read through the rest of this chapter, and we see this coming up. Verse 4; “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.” Where in verse 13; “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” Verse 16; “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things...” The way that we oppose the kingdom of darkness is through the truth that’s revealed to us in the Scripture. That’s why we need to learn. That’s how we resist. That’s why we can follow Christ without being concerned because “...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” And the Spirit dwelling with us gives us the ability to understand the Scripture and follow the truth of God. And we don’t have to be worried about being afflicted by evil spirits; we have the truth of the Lord, and that truth sets us free. We have all we need to be walking with the Lord and freeing other people from the kingdom of darkness through the gospel.

So, that brings us out of verse 19, and what happens as a result of this deliverance? Well, the masters saw what had happened. Their profit was gone, and they acted. And how did they act? Well, they accused Paul, falsely, and they arrest him, and they arrest one other person with him, and that person was Silas. So, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. And you might wonder, why are Paul and Silas being seized and not Luke and Timothy? And there’s an answer, because Paul and Silas are ethnically Jewish. Luke and Timothy were Gentiles. So, the place of the Roman Empire at that point in time was not favorable to Judaism. It never was, really, favorable to Judaism, but at different times, it was particularly not favorable, and one time was now, was this point about 51 A D because when we read over in Acts 18: 2, we find the Roman Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. So, anti-Semitism was high in the Roman Empire at this point in time. So, Paul and Silas were kind of easier pickings than Luke and Timothy were. They were the ones that the mob could easily get behind and say let’s throw these people in prison; we don’t need a big case because there was already a predisposed despising of Jewish people.

This kind of shows you the challenge that Paul’s got as he’s going now to Europe, to a place he’d never been before, encounter a culture he was not as

familiar with, and now dealing with the problem of him being Jewish, even though he was a Roman citizen. Now, they accuse him, "...and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews...'" There you go. "...and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.'" In essence, there's a truthfulness of this that they really were not technically authorized to be teaching against the Roman religion, but they certainly weren't guilty of throwing the city into confusion. You know, while this was against the law to proclaim an unapproved religion, it was the masters that created the disturbance because of their money being taken, this profit.

And if you think about this, you know things are not a whole lot different today. You know, there's a great pent up desire by the multitudes, today, to want to know about the future, and there's a lot of money to be made, today, in declaring what will happen in the future, and we can get very interested in what is, really, passing away, the things of this earth, the things that are temporal; like, what is going to happen in the near future. And not quite so interested as we ought to be in what's going to happen in eternity. So, the people that are making a lot of money off of whatever's going to happen in the near future... There's whole financial networks on television making a lot of money on what's going to happen in the near future. Or, there's a lot of people in sports making a lot of money of what's going to happen in the future or so they say, and they talk a lot about it. Or, there's a lot of money being made about who's going to win what election by how much and what we should do in light of this information in these pollings. Or, even the weather, you know, if you only knew what the weather was going to do in a month or two, you might know whether to buy soybeans or not, or cash out on corn - lots of money to be made. And even in religion, there's lots of people who are telling us what's going to happen, not in the distant future, but in the near future.

Pat Robertson, I mean, he's almost like the poster child of someone who tells us every year about what's supposedly going to happen the next year, and in spite of being incredibly wrong so many times, he continues to have a massive following. People are making a lot of money off of this because we like it so much. We want to know so badly, and I would suggest that they don't know as much as they think they know, and I think I can dogmatically say what they are talking about is not that big of a consequence compared to

what we should be concerned about, and that is eternity; that is what is going to live forever, and that is people in eternity with the Lord. If they know Him, they follow Him, and they believe Him.

So, then what happens? Alright. We have the magistrates responding to the crowd and attacking Paul. The mob, they valued this fortune-telling. It was taken away from them. This is no good. So, they're all behind the masters who want them put in prison and punished. This is a Roman colony, Philippi, and as a Roman colony, it was run by two magistrates. They were in control of the city, and they had people that helped them out. They were called the police, later on. They literally translated rod bearers, if that kind of helps you to see these people were not, like, softies. These police were able to enforce the edicts, and this is how the chief magistrates were able to have their robes torn off, and then they were beaten with rods. This is a form of justice in that time that was common enough that it happened to Paul three different times. When we look over in 2 Corinthians 11:25, he references the things that have happened to him, and he says, "Three times I was beaten with rods..." Now, we only have record in the New Testament, aside from this, of only this beating with rods right here. That means there's two other times where he was beaten with rods, flogged, that we don't know about other than what he references.

So, it shows you the difficulties that Paul faced weren't all cataloged for us. There were other difficulties that we don't have stories about, but this one we do, and he was beaten. And you're, probably, possibly aware that this beating was unlawful, and it was unlawful specifically because he was a Roman citizen. Roman law prohibited Roman citizens such as Paul from being scourged without an appeal. He had the right to an appeal. They didn't give him any time to appeal. They didn't appeal anything. They just acted. The whole Roman citizen thing was ignored. That will come up again later at the end of this story. Then, we have the story of the abuse. So, like Jesus, Paul suffered a false accusation, a mob uprising, an unjust trial and an unwarranted abuse, a flogging, a throwing into prison, a putting in stocks. All of this stuff was this abuse that he walked in - the same footsteps as the other apostles, or earlier in the book of Acts, of Jesus Himself - all unjust.

And we get a reference here to the jailor. We're going to see more about him next time, but for now, we just have a reference to him putting them in stocks because of the commandment to him to secure them, to guard them

securely. So, his attempt to do this was a serious attempt. This jailor would later believe in Jesus, but for now, he is securing them. This is a Roman colony. It's like a military installation. There was a lot of Roman soldiers. So, to have this kind of job as a jailor meant that he must be a retired soldier of some significance, like at least a centurion over a hundred other people. So, he knew what he was doing. He wasn't inept, and he put them into the inner prison. The inner prison was for dangerous criminals, and also as it was for despised people, it wasn't a place of honor by any stretch of the imagination. Now, don't think this was an elaborate prison. If this wasn't the prison, it's purported to be the prison. So, it looks something kind of like this. It's not very big. It's not very plush by any stretch of the imagination, and so, if you're in the inner part of it, it is not a comfortable place.

But there's another thing that's said, and that is that there's stocks that they're fastened to, which isn't just for security, but it's, also, a very uncomfortable thing. You know, a stock is where your feet are stuck in, so you can't get up. You can't get out, and it's not comfortable. It was a lesser form of torture, even. So, this situation that they found themselves in was not pleasant. They were stripped, beaten with rods. After beaten with rods, they were thrown in prison. They were put in stocks, and they're a thousand miles away from where they started with, in a place where they do not have people surrounding them that they can have any expectation to help them, in another continent, in a culture that was not familiar to them. This was a bleak situation. Now, you know that they're going to get out, so you could think, oh, but they get out. It's not so bad. But at this point in time, they wouldn't know if they're going to be there days, months; they're just going to die there? They don't know.

You know, each of us has situations from time to time that we would consider bleak, certainly unfavorable; I'd like to change my situation. I don't think you probably encounter too many situations that are this bad, do you? But nevertheless, we can get discouraged, and we can get concerned about our future, and I think this is a great example of how two people in their faith were undaunted, and they were not despairing. They were continuing, actually, to be joyful because they knew where their destiny awaited them, and they had deliverance. They actually were delivered in hours, but at this point, they don't know if it's going to be hours or when it's going to be, and, like with Hebrews 11, in the story of people of faith, some of those people were delivered quickly, and some of those people were never delivered until

the life to come, and we find Paul himself gets delivered here. He'll get delivered other places, but ultimately, he doesn't get delivered from everything because eventually he's put to death for his faith. We hope for deliverance, but that hope for deliverance that we have coming to us may not be in this present life, but it is definitely secured for us in the life to come that no one can take away. So, may we walk by faith, patiently waiting for the Lord's deliverance, whatever situation we may face.