

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 16 Part 3****Acts 16:16-40****“THE NIGHT THE JAILHOUSE ROCKED”**

Opportunities bring opposition. It is invariably true in the service of the Lord that that when doors of opportunity open, the devil opposes. As the apostle Paul experienced, when God opens “a great door” (I Cor. 16:9a) we can count on “many adversaries.” (I Cor. 16:9b)

When Paul and his missionary team arrived in Europe, in the city of Philippi, and began to speak God’s Good News message that frees from the bondage of sin, there was opposition from the devil. Wherever the Holy Spirit works the unholy spirits go to work also. The results of the conflict between truth and error in Philippi are very interesting. Here is what happened:

I. THERE WAS DEMONIC INTERRUPTION. Acts 16:16-24

Paul and his companions had entered Greece to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. The devil was pretty much in control of the territory so that when the light of the truth penetrated the darkness of the culture, there was a severe reaction by both the satanic minions and the society.

A. The Distraction That Was Demonic. 16:16-18

“Now it happened, as we went to prayer a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”

Isn’t it interesting the way Dr. Luke phrases the sequence of events? *“Now it happened, we went to prayer.”* One of the tactics of the devil is “interruption.” The timing here was not accidental but intentional. The devil and demons want to distract, interrupt and interfere in the worship and work of the Lord and they are masters at clock management.

I have seen the devil interrupt worship services, prayer meetings, staff meetings, funerals, etc. and it has not been surprising that he created disturbances but it was the timing of them that stamped his signature upon them. I have witnessed his infernal interventions more times on various mission fields that I have visited than I have here in America. This is not new. He has been doing that from the beginning.

When Jesus was teaching in the synagogue a man possessed by multiple demons interrupted Him saying, *“Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth?”*(Mk 1:23-25) When the devils withstand us we know that we have his disfavor, but we have the favor of God!

The poor demon-possessed girl was used as a mouth-piece by the demon to embarrass Paul and Silas. Spurgeon wrote, “The unclean spirit pretended to praise Paul and his

friends, either with the view of puffing them up with pride, or to disgust the better sort of people by leading them to identify the gospel with the ravings of the maniac girl.”(Spurgeon’s Devotional Bible)

B. The Denunciation That Was Dynamic. Acts 16:16-18

“And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour.”

Paul and company tolerated this distraction for “*many days*” before dealing with the situation. The demon in the girl spoke the truth about Paul and his missionary team, but when and if the devil ever tells the truth, he does it in a way that he hopes will discredit God’s truth.

Paul’s patience and tolerance at an end, he turned on the girl and vehemently command-ed the demon “*in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.*” And we read that “*he came out that very hour.*” Here was a public exorcism that exposed the evil motivation of the masters of the girl and the merchants who were profiting from her demonic activities. It also brought down the wrath of the multitude upon Paul and company.

C. The Detention That Was Dramatic. Acts 16:19-24

“But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.” And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

There was a counter-attack by the devil when Paul cast the demon out of the damsel. The citizenry, led by the greedy merchants, attacked the missionaries, dragged them before the authorities, used anti-Semitic verbiage saying, “*These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city*”, which resulted in Paul and companions being stripped naked, beaten and jailed. The opportunity to advance the gospel resulted in intense opposition to the gospel. But that is not the end of the story. God always wins! This is how He did it.....

II. THERE WAS DIVINE INTERVENTION. Acts 16:25-28

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 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 chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

A. The Singing in Jail. “*Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.*”

Indeed, as Job said “*God my Maker, gives songs in the night.*” (Job 35:10) Genuine Christianity is not a sigh but a song! Therefore, midnight melodies echoed throughout the dungeon in Philippi as Paul and his co-worker sang hymns and prayed “*and the prisoners*

were listening to them.” It would be saying the obvious to say that Paul and Silas had a “captive audience!”

Stripped of clothing, beaten and then shackled with feet in stocks is not a good posture for singing duets. But sing they did and what a testimony that must have been to the other prisoners. Martin Luther said, “Even when I cannot seem to pray, thank God, I can always sing!” They had never heard anything like it. What an encouragement for us to go public with our Christianity!

B. The Shaking Of The Jail. *“Suddenly there was a great earthquake.”*

God has many means by which to get one’s attention. Whether the earthquake occurred as a result of God moving the earth or as a result of natural forces, it accomplished a divine purpose. The timing of it suggests that God was in control of it.

C. The Salvation Of The Jailer - Acts 16:29-34

“Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then 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 stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

Suddenly awakened from his sleep by the shaking of the earth, and aware that such a destructive force probably freed the prisoners, for which, under penalty of death he as jailer was responsible, he ran to Paul and Silas who were obviously in touch with the Power that shook the place so violently.

He said, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* He must have had respect for them to address them as *“Sirs.”* Wardens of prisons do not address lowly prisoners as *“Sir.”* The demeanor and the testimonies of Paul and Silas had registered with this man. It is my belief that Paul and Silas had previously witnessed to this jailer which laid the basis for him coming to them with the question, *“what must I do to be saved?”* He was not speaking of being saved from an earthquake. He could have escaped to the outside of the prison had he wanted to for *“all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.”*

No, this man was not seeking salvation from an “earthquake” but from a “soul quake!” He thought judgment day had come and he was not ready to meet his Maker. He had heard these missionaries singing and praying and he knew that they had something that he did not have. Do not miss the words *“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him.”* God got his attention and Paul and Silas gave him the answer to the question, *“What must I do to be saved?”*

The answer given was, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* Notice that they did not present a partial Savior but the totality of His Person. It means that Jesus is to be received as *Lord*. By this His deity is being acknowledged and He has the right to rule one’s life; it means one must believe in Him as *Jesus* the

Savior, the One whose death and resurrection makes it possible to be forgiven; it means to acknowledge Him as the *Christ*, that is, the only One appointed by God to save the guilty sinner.

Saving belief is more than accepting the premise that there is a God. The devils believe in God and are not saved. (James 2:19) To believe savingly is to accept the totality of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ's atonement, not by our attainment; by God's mercy, not by our merit; by Jesus' dying, not by our doing! The night the jailhouse rocked, the jailer and his family were saved by believing individually in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and to prove it they were baptized. What a night!

III. THERE WAS DECISIVE INTERACTION. Acts 16:35-40

A jailbreak had been averted, a jailer had been converted and now the jailbirds were about to be vindicated.

A. The Release of The Missionaries.

"And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

The merchants had lost their money-making scheme when the demon was cast out of the poor girl who was bringing them money by her fortune-telling and now the magistrates lost face when they discovered that their hasty arrest of Paul and Silas was illegal because they were Roman citizens and to be beaten and imprisoned without trial was contrary to Roman laws. Consequently, word was sent to the prison to release Paul and Silas.

B. The Response of The Missionaries.

"But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city."

I love this part of the story. We do not need to roll over and play dead when we are unjustly violated in public. Paul knew the privileges of a Roman citizen and that he had been publicly disgraced. If they were to ever have credibility restored and have any further ministry in this country, the authorities would have to publicly acknowledge their error. Therefore, the public appearance of the magistrates at the jail to release Paul and Silas went a long way in restoring the honor of these two honorable men.

C. The Reunion of The Missionaries.

"So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed."

Lydia's house evidently had become the meeting place for the new church in Philippi. So was logical for the freed missionaries to lodge at Lydia's. Do not miss these words: *"when they had seen the brethren...."* Who were *"the brethren"*? Evidently they were servants in

Lydia's household. Acts 16:15 tells us that "*she and her household were baptized....*"

After the missionary team from the far away church in Antioch had said their farewells to the new Christians in Philippi, they went on their way. What a wonderful historical record the 16th chapter of Acts is. A new worker joins up, Timothy; a new field opens up, Europe; lost sinners wake up, Lydia, Jailer, etc. and a new church starts up, Philippi.

As Paul and companions left Philippi to spread the Gospel to other areas yet unreached, I believe that, if they had known it, they would have sung:

"To the regions beyond I must go, I must go
Where the story has never been told;
To the millions that never have heard of His love,
I must tell the sweet story of old.
*To the regions beyond I must go, I must go,
Till the world, all the world,
His salvation shall know.*"

-Albert B. Simpson

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