
Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Acts 16:16-26

Lesson 29 – When doing right gets you in trouble

Acts 16:16-26 (NIV)

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

Discussion Questions

1. **Have you ever assumed that because something was difficult, God must not be in it? What if the resistance you are experiencing is actually connected to your obedience?**

Scripture: Acts 16:6–10, 22–24; John 16:33

- A. How do we distinguish between trouble caused by our own bad decisions and trouble that comes because we are faithfully following God?

sermon stated: "Trouble is not always evidence that you missed God."

2. **The slave girl said the right thing, but the wrong spirit was behind it. What have you accepted simply because it sounded good, looked spiritual, or affirmed something you wanted to hear?**

Scripture: Acts 16:16–18; 1 John 4:1; 2 Corinthians 11:14

- A. Is discernment harder when the counterfeit is telling us something we *want* to believe?

3. **Everybody who recognizes your gift does not necessarily deserve access to your life. So how do you determine who gets access to you?**

Scripture: Mark 1:23–25; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 7:15–20

A. What is the difference between someone **celebrating you, using you, needing you, and genuinely loving you**? *sermon warned us not to confuse recognition with relationship.*

4. **The owners were comfortable with this woman as long as her brokenness benefited them. Have you ever had someone resist the healthier version of you because they benefited from the unhealthy version?**

Scripture: Acts 16:18–19; John 8:36; Galatians 5:1

A. What happens when following Jesus requires you to establish boundaries with people who were comfortable with your dysfunction?

5. **Here is the harder question: Is it possible that we are benefiting from somebody else's brokenness and don't realize it?**

Scripture: Acts 16:19; Isaiah 10:1–2; Micah 6:8

A. Instead of only asking, “*Who is exploiting me?*” ask: “**Where might I have become comfortable with a situation because it works in my favor?**”

B. What would repentance look like if doing what is right actually cost us something?

6. **Why do you think people sometimes become angry when someone they could once control becomes free?**

Scripture: Acts 16:19–21; Galatians 5:1

A. How can you tell the difference between someone who misses **you** and someone who misses their **access, influence, or control over you**?

Sermon States: “They miss the version of you they could manipulate.”

7. **Why was it easier for the owners to say, “These men are Jews,” than to say, “These men just cost us money”?**

Scripture: Acts 16:19–22; James 2:1–9

A. Why is prejudice such an effective tool for hiding greed, fear, and the desire for power? Where do we still see people attacking **identity** instead of dealing honestly with the **issue**?

8. **When does personal sin become systemic injustice?**

Scripture: Acts 16:20–23; Isaiah 10:1–2; Amos 5:11–15, 24

the sermon traces the progression: **economic exploitation** → **prejudice** → **false accusation** → **mob mentality** → **governmental abuse** → **violence**.

A. At what point does the church have a responsibility to stop talking only about changing individual hearts and begin confronting systems that harm people?

9. **If something is legal but clearly violates God's justice, what responsibility does a Christian have?**

Scripture: Exodus 1:15–21; Daniel 3:16–18; Acts 5:29

A. The Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh. Daniel violated the king's decree. The apostles declared, “*We must obey God rather than human beings.*” So how do Christians determine when obedience to God requires

resistance to human authority?

Sermon reference: “Legality and morality are not synonyms.”

10. Why are we so easily influenced by crowds—even when we know crowds can be wrong?

Scripture: Acts 16:22; Mark 15:11–15; Exodus 23:2

A. Have you ever believed something about somebody because **everybody else said it**, without actually knowing the facts? What does Christian integrity require when the crowd has already decided someone is guilty?

11. Which requires greater faith: believing God will keep you out of trouble—or believing God is still God when He allows you to go through it?

Scripture: Acts 16:22–24; Romans 8:35–39; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

A. Paul obeyed God and still got beaten. How should that change the way we understand suffering, favor, blessing, and God's presence?

Personal Reflection: Can you identify a painful season where you initially thought God had abandoned you but later recognized that He was sustaining you?

12. Paul and Silas praised God before anything changed. Can you still worship God when you don't know whether the prison door is going to open?

Scripture: Acts 16:24–26; Habakkuk 3:17–19; Psalm 34:1

Don't rush to the earthquake. **Sit at midnight for a minute.** Their backs still hurt. Their feet were still chained. Their circumstances had not changed—and they worshiped anyway.

Final challenge: What is your “verse 24” right now—the place where the story looks bad because God hasn't finished writing it yet? And can you trust Him enough not to make a permanent conclusion in the middle of an unfinished chapter?

“Where am I judging God from an unfinished chapter of my own life?”

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

Philippi (Part II): The Power of Sin and Money Vs. the Power of Jesus' Name, 16:16-24

(16:16-24) **Introduction:** this is a descriptive picture of the world's power vs. the power of Jesus' name.

1. The power of human sin (v.16-17).

2. The power of Jesus' name (v.18).

3. The power of money and greed (v.19-24).

1. (16:16-17) **Occult— Fortune-Telling— Sorcery— Wealth:** the power of human sin is seen in three persons or spirits.

1. There was the damsel (*paidisken*) or slave girl possessed by "a spirit of divination" (*pneuma puthōna* ^{PWS: 3697}), of foretelling the future and fate of people. Note the Greek word "*puthona*" which is our English word python, referring to the large python serpent. In ancient myth the Greek god Apollo was said to have slain the great serpent or dragon python. As a result Apollo took both his great gift of predictions and his name. Apollo became known as "puthios Apollo" or "Python Apollo." The young slave girl is said to have the spirit of "python" (*puthona*); that is, the people thought she was the voice, the oracle of the great Greek god Apollo. There were also ventriloquists who were thought to be empowered with the spirit of Apollo.

Note: Scripture says that the young slave girl was possessed by an evil spirit (Acts 16:18) which gave her the power of fortune-telling. As a result, people went to her for hope that...

- their desires would be fulfilled.
- their futures would be good.
- their confidence would be restored.
- their fortunes would be at hand.
- their lost items would be found.
- their past would be unravelled.
- their mysteries would be solved.

The point to see is the power of sin to enslave and bind a person in the dark world of divination, fortune-telling, witchcraft, black magic, sorcery, and astrology. All false approaches to the truth are similar. They come from the dark world of evil spirits, spirits that cause people to put their trust in such things as...

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| • fortune tellers | • the stars |
| • soothsayers | • sorceries |
| • palm readers | • the zodiac |

- seances
- a deck of cards

Just imagine! People are trusting such things instead of God. How deceived and blinded men are! How dark the world is—the dark world of evil spirits...

- that cause people to trust such things instead of God.
- that keep people away from the Word of God and the true promises of God.
- that blind people to the reality of prayer.
- that keep people away from the grace of God, the grace of the only living and true God, the Sovereign Majesty of the universe, the only Sovereign Spirit who can truly save them.

The power of sin is strong, very strong in the dark world of evil spirits.

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22-23).

"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24).

"To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:10-12).

"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus" (Acts 13:6).

2. There were the men possessed by the spirit of greed and materialism. The young girl was a slave exploited by men to make money. They used her fortune-telling ability to play upon the needs of people for hope and confidence, self-esteem and direction. Note the words "much gain." She was apparently the leader among all the soothsayers, the one from whom the upper class sought advice and counsel. This would explain why the people were riled up so quickly and why the magistrates or rulers acted so quickly in condemning Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19-24).

The point to note is this: the strong and the wealthy always have and always will exploit and use the weak for their own ends, whether in prostitution, fortune-telling, labor, false worship, sexual gratification, or whatever. The world has always witnessed *white slavery*, *black slavery*, *child slavery*, *national slavery* and a horde of other forms of slavery. Whatever the form, the purpose of the strong and wealthy is always onefold: to satisfy either their desires and urges or to fill their pockets. In the present passage the emphasis is upon filling their pockets, upon greed and materialism. Note: the dark world of greed and materialism is the dark world of evil spirits—the evil spirits of selfishness that misuse and exploit people for personal gain.

"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10).

"Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days" (James 5:3).

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exodus 20:17).

"Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!" (Habakkuk 2:9).

3. There is the young slave girl and the evil spirit of deception within her. Note three things.

a. The testimony of the evil spirit was a true testimony. Paul and the others *were* "the servants of the most high God."

b. The testimony of the evil spirit was also a false testimony. This is seen in the Greek which reads, "*a way* of salvation," not "the way." The word "the" (the definite article) is not in the Greek. The evil spirit is proclaiming that Paul preaches only one of many ways to reach God. (How like today!)

c. The testimony, although partly true, is unacceptable. Such acknowledgement is a false witness, a profession only. The evil spirit was not confessing from the heart or will that he would follow Jesus. He had not been born again. The *only confession* Jesus accepts is the confession of a man who makes a deliberate decision to follow Him *as Lord*. (See note—' Mark 1:25-26.)

The point is the power of human sin. Sin is so powerful that it can enslave a person and swamp him in the dark world...

- of divination and the occult.
- of greed and materialism.
- of deception and false witness.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

2. (16:18) Jesus Christ: the power of Jesus' name. Note four facts.

1. The false witness was a barrage that lasted many days. The slave girl followed Paul and his companions day by day when they went to prayer. As she followed she shouted out the great but false oracle:

"These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us [a] way of salvation" (Acts 16:17).

Note: her proclamation was a barrage that would be embarrassing, and it went on for many days. Why Paul did not act sooner is not known. It could be that he feared a reaction from the worldly-minded, sensing from God that it was not yet time to stop the false witness.

2. The day arrived when Paul became "grieved" (*diaponētheis* ^{PWS: 1816}). The word means pained, deeply troubled, worked up, annoyed, and angry (a righteous anger). He was troubled and hurting...

- over the girl being enslaved by sin.
- over the girl being so used by greedy and lustful men.
- over the false witness to the Lord's name.
- over the mockery and ridicule of his ministry as the servant of Christ.

3. The moment came when Paul called upon the strong name of Jesus Christ. He whipped around and healed the girl. Note exactly what Paul did.

a. He addressed the evil spirit within the girl. She was gripped by an *evil spirit of divination or of the occult*. The power she had was not her own, but of an evil spirit. It was the evil spirit that was the problem, not the girl. Therefore, Paul addressed the evil spirit.

b. Paul called upon "the name of Jesus Christ." The power to cast out the evil spirit was of Christ, not of Paul (See Deeper Study #2, Name—Acts 3:6 for discussion.)

4. The enslaved girl was immediately and completely delivered. It was the very same hour that the evil spirit came out.

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

"But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

3. (16:19-24) Greed— Wealth: the power of money and greed is pictured in what follows.

1. Money and greed caused an outcry and opposition against the gospel. And note why: because the owners of the enslaved girl had lost their top money-maker. She had been delivered by the power of Christ. They were frustrated and angry, full of wrath and vengeance. They caught Paul and Silas and dragged (*heilkusan* ^{PWS: 1168}, the idea is violently) them before the magistrates of the city. The magistrates in a Greek city were the governors or rulers. They were equal to the consuls in Roman government.

2. Money and greed caused false charges. The preachers were said...

- to be dangerous.
- to be troubling people and disturbing the public peace.
- to be teaching different customs and carrying on illegal religious activities. Strict Roman law allowed conquered nations to continue their own religious practices, but did not allow the foreign religions to evangelize among Roman citizens.

The same charges are often brought against Christian believers by the world. Even in free democracies where the rights of free speech are so loudly proclaimed, these same charges are made by the world against true Christianity.

Note the emphasis upon "these men, being Jews." This is a slur of racial prejudice. The emperor Claudius had just expelled all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2). The Romans' hatred of the Jews was at a peak when Paul and his company were ministering in Philippi.

3. Money and greed caused corruption of public officials. Note the officials gave in to the influential owners and to the public. True justice was by-passed. Paul and Silas were not allowed to answer for themselves; in fact, they were not even allowed to speak. If the court had been interested in true justice, the magistrates would have discovered that the two men were Roman citizens much sooner than they did (cp. Acts 16:37-40), and they would have found out that the two men had only helped a poor enslaved girl. An *open and thinking* mind would have seen the enormous contribution the preachers could have made...

- in helping to deliver people from sin, hopelessness, and darkness.
- in strengthening society through righteousness and justice.
- in guiding people to harness their energies in creativity and development instead of focusing them upon immorality and pleasure.

However, the officials and rulers were neither open-minded nor honest. They allowed themselves to be influenced and guided by their own selfish purpose. They gave in to the money and greed of influential people and the cry of the duped populace who were following the influential.

4. Money and greed caused shameful, unjust, and evil treatment (cp. 1 Thes. 2:2). Paul and Silas, the great servants of God who had done such a glorious deed...

- had their clothes torn off.
- were beaten with rods "many" times (cp. 2 Cor. 11:23).
- were cast into prison—a dark, dirty, rat and roach infested dungeon.
- were thrust into the inner cells—a solitary confinement type of situation.
- had their feet locked in chains.

The point is this: the two godly servants were treated this way because of some men who were consumed with the dark spirit of money and greed. Such a dark, evil spirit has great power, but God has greater power.

"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Thought 1. The great tragedy of so many in the world is that they put selfishness, greed, and money before people. It is because of selfishness that so many influential people attack genuine believers. But Christ changes lives. He changes...

- the immoral to the moral • the unjust to the just • the dishonest to the honest • the prideful to the humble
- the powerful to the servant • the wealthy to the benevolent • the authoritarian to the helpful

So many of the influential, wealthy, and powerful are unwilling to become servants of mankind—servants who sacrifice all they are and have for the needy. They are unwilling to truly sacrifice themselves and their money to help the desperate of the world. Therefore, they oppose anything that requires them to *sacrifice* their selfishness. They will give and help enough to salve their consciences, but not sacrificially.

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5).

"Let your conversation [behavior] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live" (Proverbs 15:27).

"Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!" (Habakkuk 2:9).

Thought 2. Much of what man does and enjoys is built upon the immoral, unjust, dishonest, and selfish treatment of others, such things as:

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|-----------------|---------------|
| ⇒ gratification | ⇒ employment |
| ⇒ money | ⇒ pleasure |
| ⇒ position | ⇒ social life |

Therefore, when the believer proclaims righteousness, he can expect to be opposed.

"But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues" (Matthew 10:17).

"Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29).

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible