

# Span-13 Acts 16 - Paul the Apostle

by Art Katz

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*The sermon explores the essence of apostolic ministry, emphasizing the importance of obedience to the Spirit of God, even when it contradicts our logic or success.*

**Duration:** 1:08:59

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 16:6, Acts 16:16-17, Hebrews 3:4

**Topics:** "Paul The Apostle"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not just being a sermon, but living out the teachings of God. He highlights the struggles and obedience of apostolic figures like Paul, who endured suffering and persecution for their faith. The speaker challenges the audience to consider how much they are willing to submit to God's school and suffer for their beliefs. He also discusses the story of Paul and Silas in prison, where their faith and freedom in Christ remained steadfast despite their circumstances. The sermon encourages listeners to act in faith, even when they don't see immediate results, and to trust in God's calling for their lives.

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## Transcript

And I want to invite our sister who is traveling with us, Sarah Cotalessi, whose husband Dan has been with us, to express our gratitude for the hospitality we have received in these days. We have been unspeakably privileged in one visit to Antigua and also to the Mayan ruins, the kind of thing that Americans dream a lifetime to obtain. The Lord hit out on us in one visit and a privileged time with the little boys here in the orphanage who wrote me a sweet letter of appreciation which we will cherish.

So, Sarah, come up. Good evening. It's a privilege to be here.

Brother Art tells me to thank you and he takes all my words. But I want to express my gratitude and our gratitude. You came to receive from us, but you have no idea how much we have received through you.

Your love has overshadowed us. Not only my long-lost cousin, but all of you are so very special. Your love is expressed through your eyes and the Word of God says that we will know them, His people, by their love.

And I declare tonight that you are the people of God and it is a privilege to be with you. May God bless you tonight. May your hearts be open tonight.

May the eyes of your spirit be open tonight. May you understand the mysteries that God has for you tonight. The antiquities were impressive, but we love the Living Church more.

That is really the highlight. So I have my jacket off already because this is going to be an intensive work because what's in my heart is to get at the essence of what is apostolic. What is the genius of what is apostolic? What is the essence? What is the center? What is the main thing of being apostolic? Because to that we have been called as holy brethren called by the High Priest and by the Apostle of our Confession.

So how can we find an answer to this? This must be found throughout the New Testament. And I want us to examine one episode in the life of Paul in Acts chapter 16 because one episode is expressive of all. This is an episode out of the life of an Apostle.

But it contains everything. And it begins by describing in verse 5 the success which the Apostle and his company have achieved so that churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily. God has been blessing their labors and making them fruitful.

And then we come to this startling change in verse 6 Read that. Is there some mistake here? Some printer made a mistake in our edition? Can this be correct? They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word? This contradicts all of our categories. Forbidden to preach? It's the whole purpose for our being.

And forbidden by the Holy Spirit Himself. That is stupefying. All the more as God has given them success to this moment.

So they came to another place in verse 7. And they tried another place. But the Spirit did not permit them. This is an unusual way for us to consider the operation of the Spirit.

We know the Spirit that says go. But do we know the Spirit that says stop? And stop in our success? When the Spirit of God can stop a minister in his success He has the minister. This is one of the most significant and pivotal moments in New Testament history.

God is about to send the Gospel into Europe. Where it has not been before. Only in Asia.

But first His sermon had to be stopped. How many of us can press through the inhibition of God's Spirit? And justify ourselves. Even by citing Scripture.

Go into all the world and preach this Gospel to every creature. But the Spirit of God said in this part of the world, stop. You are prohibited.

Do you know the Spirit of God like that? That is apostolic. When it is given by a God who does not supply an explanation. To an apostle who does not require it.

Isn't this fantastic? Of the exquisite leading of the Holy Spirit Beyond and through even men's religious convictions. Even against the seeming Word of God. When we will follow Him in that way.

Then are we moving apostolically. So a vision appeared to Paul in the night in verse 9. A man from Macedonia. In Europe.

In Greece. And he pleaded saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. So after he had seen the vision.

Immediately we sought to go. Absolutely assured that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them. This one verse should occupy us all night.

One man receives the vision. But all who were related with him assuredly gathered that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them. Was that a vision or was that indigestion? Macedonia.

Who has never thought of that? Paul, are you sure? Because if we make a mistake. It could be tragic. And as we read on.

Their obedience gave every appearance of being a mistake. Only one woman got saved. Lydia, the Vestal of Purple.

And one woman got delivered. And they ended in jail. Where they could have rotted and died.

And never be seen of their brethren again. And the enemy at their elbow. You thought you were obedient.

And look where it has got you. Obedience to the Spirit of God is not to be measured by our success. Is God going to send his prime chief apostle from the field of his success in Asia? To a remote place for one or two women? How the enemy will mock such a servant.

Look where it has got you. In the inner dungeon. Never to be heard from again.

There is physical suffering in obedience to God. But the mental suffering. The moral anguish.

Did we miss him? Was that vision really from God? Did I err in my obedience? Is there a question which a servant of God must always live with? You can pray all that you want. And seek the Lord with all sincerity. But are we impeccable? Even a Paul? Can he not err in his decision? And lead his brethren into the same error? Away from the area of God's effective work? For a single woman? To die in a dungeon? The greatest anguish of Paul.

Even Paul. What then of us? Is that in our sufferings, in what we thought was obedience, we have to allow the question. Did we miss God? No true servant of an apostolic or prophetic kind will ever live without that tension.

It is with us always. Even tonight. What do I speak to you in our final time together? Of all the good things that can be spoken.

What is the single choice and appointed thing? Is it Act 16? An interesting text. But if we miss it, we have lost a moment that will never be given again. And because the word is not the appointed word, bearing the life of God, and only a technically true word, it brings a death, a deadening to God's people.

We don't go out the same way we come in. These are not just meetings. Not just services.

Not just sermons that we can applaud or be indifferent. Crucial critical. And you never know for sure.

And there's a moment that comes when they say, come up to the holy desk and speak. The servant is required to act. In all of the tension of his not being absolutely sure, he must yet act.

Serving God like that is a suffering. All the more if you don't see the fruit of your labor. And it seems in every way to have been a failure.

And the enemy is quickly there to assure you it is an error. You've missed the Lord, brother. And 25 or 30 years of service is no assurance that you will always be sure.

The remarkable thing in verse 10 is that only one man had the vision. But all that were with him were assured that it was a vision from God. But all that were with him were assuring that the Lord had called them.

So they set forth with a straight course and came to that principal city in Macedonia. No ifs, ands, or buts. Such an assurance of a vision that had not come to them but had come to another.

And they went forth immediately with every confidence that it was the Lord's call for them. Don't pass this over lightly. This is the genius of the apostolic church itself.

Such a relationship with the apostle. Such a knit of tested confidence. That his vision is their vision.

And they have an absolute confidence. And set forth with a straight course. A woman once said to me My husband wants to give up his business and his home and our home and he wants us to go to a school of discipleship and serve God? It's ridiculous, she said.

And I'll not go until that vision comes to me. So I said You'll never go. Because it will never come to you.

It will only come to the head of the body. Your husband. And you need to be in such a quality of relationship with him that his call is your call with all assurance.

There's no place in the apostolic church for casual relationship. This is the heart of the matter. Paul is no virtuoso performer.

He has been sent forth from an apostolic body by the laying on of hands in identification and joining that when he comes to the place of ministry there's a depth of power a reality, a God witness that testifies to the reality of the relationships with which he's joined and out of which he has been sent. For the root Greek meaning of the word apostolos is a sent one out of Antioch. When men who were of different races we know that by their names one man was Nigel, a black man and Mediterranean men of Roman descent Jews like Paul and when they waited and worshipped the Lord together the Holy Ghost said separate unto me Paul and Silas for the work of the ministry.

This reality that you have in Antioch this truth of your relationships that has risen above every racial, ethnic and national tension and bias that has risen above every racial, ethnic and national tension and bias this is what I want to bring into the world this is the heavenly reality and you have expressed it in worship now you can be sent. The Bible is so discreet and silent on some things How did they come to this quality of relationship? Was it some casual brushing aside of the real issues?

The deep prejudices that are in the heart of every man? Or had they experienced something together? In their face-to-face relationship in talking something out in working something out by the sanctifying power of God that they could worship God together?

What an opportunity is yours in the diversity that makes you up to catch the genius of Antioch not superficially but authentically not a little hug brother where we have not worked out the deepest issues of what it means to be a brother against all the history of enmity between Gentile and Jew between black and white that's the church they assured that the Lord had assuredly called them they assured that the Lord

had assuredly called them such was their relationship with Paul and you need to come again to the church otherwise there will be no one sent no sending that will stir that will turn the world upside down they arrived to the first city of the main nation of Europe and in verse 13 we read that on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside where prayer was accustomed

to be made by women well, this Paul now is too much one thing is to stop when he was successful but another thing is to come to another part of the world but having come there in the principal city on the Sabbath night in the greatest opportunity to touch the life of this city and make his presence felt he goes out of the city to the riverside and finds some women who are accustomed to praying there Paul, you have really missed it it's obvious you have never gone to a school for disciples yet you are not making the most of your opportunities what led you out of the city? we are not told did he see a vision? did he hear a voice? or something even much more subtle the mere disposition of his spirit what we Americans call a hunch an inward sense of something sufficient to affect the man's

move in a critical moment do we know the Lord like that? it's one thing to be obedient when we hear his voice how shall we not obey? when the Lord speaks but when he is silent when there are options and choices what do we choose? where do we go? how do we act? and on what do we base our actions? can you have a confidence that in the absence of any revelation any vision any word from God that the faintest disposition in your inner man that would contradict your best logic will be the basis for your obedience that's apostolic and it is not obtained in a day so a lady by the name of Lydia comes to the Lord because she heeded the things that Paul spoke she and her household were baptized and she persuaded them Paul and his companions to stay with her Paul and Silas will soon be leaving but

the stigma of identifying with them and extending hospitality that will remain and she will bear as one who is converted by the apostolic proclamation I want to pray I thought to pray at the beginning and I got carried away let's pause for a moment to ask the Lord's blessing so that his blessing continues with us let us become only a sermon so that we do not become only a sermon Lord, we cry out to you and we ask you free us from that this is more than a text to enjoy it has not been given as a vehicle to preach but this is the life the struggle of men of flesh and blood they trembled over their obedience always alive to the possibility that they might miss the Lord who is perfect? what a tension and struggle for so little reward no little evidence of obedience surely they must have

missed it help us to respect what is described here to let it come deeply into our spirits Lord of what is an apostolic episode for if we are not called to this we are called to nothing but a mere repetition of services and not the touching of the world how do we come to that place? where we can act when you do not speak when you do not reveal when we have to trust the witness of our inward man what does it take to come to that place in you? may we consecrate ourselves that whatever it takes you will bring us to that place for the glory of the latter house must exceed the former so Lord I appeal to you as the high priest and the apostle of our confession transform this night into an historic insertion into the body of Christ in Guatemala that will spill out to the Macedonians of the world

a church that can send those who turn the world upside down who are obedient to the Holy Spirit not only when he says go but when he says stop in Jesus name Lord help us help us we read in verses 16 and 17 that there was a woman who was a slave who operated by a demonic spirit the spirit of divination and her masters were making much profit from her and this pitiful piece of humanity this demoniacal wreck this little nothing a piece of merchandise followed Paul and Silas all the time crying out with her half crazed voice these are the servants of the most high God who show unto us the way of salvation and the scripture

says this did she many days I'm sure that Paul's patience must have been exhausted how long must a man tolerate this irritation so he turned in a moment of time and he

commanded that evil spirit to come out and he came out that very hour and so was set in motion a process by which Paul and his companion were arrested brought into the marketplace where the rulers are then and now this matrix of commerce and government business and rule Paul had not just delivered a woman I mean, Paul not only had to live with a woman he was not treating her as a woman but when his owners saw that his earnings were disappearing I mean, Paul had touched the heart of something he was touching the whole system predicated on profit by the exploiting of a victim it's what the world is all about to this day you touch that and you'll find yourself in a dungeon but so long as your religion is only a Sunday phenomenon even with mid-week service and in no way threatens the system

the status quo that grinds out its victims for profit they will allow you to continue and give you tax-deductible authenticity but touch this system threaten this system and the deep and vested interests of men for profit and you'll find yourself stripped and beaten with many rocks and thrown into an inner dungeon this is no longer religion you have penetrated the secular you have brought deliverance to the captive you've challenged the whole system that is the manifestation of the powers of darkness in which men have lived so long they think it normative but Paul turned and commanded that spirit not because he was irritated but because he was grieved at a woman who was a victim and had not a life unto herself but was a piece of merchandise a demoniacal wreck why didn't he deliver her

earlier? because this she did for many days but there came a moment the moment of God and Paul knew it he did not act on the basis of principle because even to do the same act at the wrong time is to miss the whole purpose of God who is sufficient for these things? to have such a sensitivity not only for the will of God but for the time of God a man who is not acting for his convenience but out of God's very grief for what was done to one made in his own image and what did it earn him? was stripped of his clothing publicly in the marketplace when they all rose up together against him the humiliation of that of the kind that Jesus had to experience at Calvary what, you think he was given the convenience of a loincloth? that they respected the dignity of his person? he was hung naked as was

Paul there is no place for the human dignity in apostolic obedience in apostolic obedience and Paul found himself thrown into a dungeon with his companion imagine how they felt many strokes had been laid upon them they were more dead than alive their back hung in strips of tattered flesh their back hung in strips of tattered flesh they were numb with pain and cast into an inner dungeon their feet fastened in stocks they could not even adjust their position the stink of that cell the human excretion the urination the moaning of prisoners this is not a vacation like prisons today in America where they have athletic facilities to lift weights a prison in the ancient world was an invitation to death there was no medical treatment for their wounds in the filthiest setting imaginable the

gangrene was certain and death without any ability to communicate to the body of Christ what is their condition and need and then we come to this great verse verse 25 at midnight we know what midnight is the darkest hour when the enemy is having a field day playing on your tortured mind you have really missed the Lord look how he was blessing you in Asia numbers added to the church daily and what have you here one woman saved one woman delivered and now the end of your life you have really missed the Lord the darkest depression the greatest doubts the most experienced servants comes at midnight you'll be brought to such midnights if you're obedient to the heavenly vision I have joked in these days we have been treated so grandly we have had sublime lunches treated like king's sons on the

very day that I preached about martyrdom how do you retain your sanity it's seeming contradiction but the day will come children when I will not be abounding but abating and I will remember the joy of the fellowship and the exquisite way that we were treated when we are in the hands of those who are not the servants of God and suffer their mistreatment do you know what apostolic is the ability to receive the one or the other with complete equanimity the ability to receive the one or the other as coming from the hand of God and to rejoice as much in the prison than at the restaurant at the Hyatt Hotel same God same privilege whether we abound or we abate at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God this is either utter insanity their sufferings have deranged their minds or its

ultimate sanity or it's a total sanity praising God for suffering for the prospect of death without the comfort of the brethren in a stinking cell in complete obscurity and rejoicing for that that's either madness or it's sanity and I call it sanity they were praising God for the privilege of sharing the sufferings of Christ for his namesake for it is for the Philippians that Paul writes the letter that has enriched the church of Jesus Christ for all generations that I might know him in the fellowship of his suffering and the power of his resurrection those two things go together an exquisite and intimate knowledge of God that comes only at midnight in abject cells in painful suffering not out of our stupidity but out of our obedience to the Holy Spirit of God a church was born out of

this and the epistles to that church sustain us to this day because a man was obedient to be stopped in his success and to be directed by the Spirit in whatever form God gives when that praise came forth it says the prisoners heard them I expect to find every one of those prisoners in heaven who hear men praise God in the midst of their affliction that contradicts every human reckoning that men should groan under their distress but to praise God in the midst of distress to hear that is to be liberated in fact the Spirit of God was so manifest compounded all the more by praise in suffering it caused an earthquake God inhabits the praises of his people yes, when we are comfortably seated in the assemblies of God but all the more in the midst of our suffering for where the Spirit of the Lord

is there is liberty yes, there in the stinking cell the ground shook the iron doors burst open the fetters and shackles fell off the arms and legs of men nothing that binds or restricts can remain where the Spirit of Liberty is as it is expressed out of the mouths of servants in the midst of their suffering and the prison keeper awake from his sleep persuaded that these men had fled the cell that will cost him his career his retirement and all that he had thought to enjoy in his latter years he was ready to kill himself he took out his sword and Paul cried out yet in prison do yourself no harm we are still here because bars do not a prison make to be free in Christ is to be free in deed with bars or without bars we are still here nothing has changed for us we were free when we were in

shackles and now we are not we are not running and taking our opportunity do yourself no harm the man called for a light and came trembling into the prison and prostrated at the feet of Paul and Silas Sir, what must I do to be saved? how can I come into this freedom? all of a sudden I realized I thought I had the keys but I was really the captive of the need for security following orders doing the right thing putting you in the innerdent how do I come into your freedom? that is salvation to the others so Paul and Silas preached to him and to his whole household the word of God they washed their wounds they cared for them they believed they were baptized the church was born a woman at the riverside a prison keeper living a life of fear and anxiety for security was set free by the example

of men in bonds this is not just a historical moment in the apostolic history of the church this is symbolic this is a statement of what the church is about what its role is to the captives of the world whether they're

slaves or prison keepers they're all bound all lost all enslaved all being crushed out of their humanity God has to set into their midst men who are free in Christ no matter their circumstances inside the prison or out and can rejoice at midnight in the midst of their afflictions and the tormenting activity of the powers of darkness you have really missed it look what it has got you Paul and Silas rejoiced man sang praises to God that's apostolic it's not formed in a day but God waits to hear from men and women who say whatever the cost enroll me in such a school as this

bring me to such a place such a jealousy for your glory greater than my ambition that I could be stopped in my success in obedience without looking for the evidence and yet rejoice this is a lifestyle this is an entire mode of being this is more than a succession of good services it's the formation of apostolic character it's priestly like the High Priest and the Apostle of our Confession it turns the world upside down it frees its prisoners and the age will conclude with it to those who will suffer for it and count it all privilege that they could rejoice at midnight are you such a church? is this your desire? how far are you willing to go? what are you willing to have God understand? about you and your future how much are you willing to submit to his school? of those who complain today

over much less than what Paul suffered? somebody looks at us at the wrong way? they didn't notice us? they didn't give us the greeting we deserve? and we're offended? how shall we be stripped naked? beaten with rods? be put in a dungeon? where we can't even adjust our position? and rejoice? this is a school and God is looking for candidates there's no compulsion it's a freely chosen thing for those who are willing to serve the Lord in apostolic labor in the last days are you willing? how far are you willing to go? this far, no further? a little inconvenience, yes but suffering? of a physical and a mental kind? this is not for me brother and so long as it's not for you the prisoners languish the prisoners languish the prison keepers with them the demoniacal women who are made merchandise

in this world waiting for deliverance that comes only by those who are saved this is my last contribution to you a jealousy for apostolic reality that you might be willing for your nation's sake for the prisoners everywhere those that are free in Christ are free indeed they are truly free let's pray thank you precious God for putting before us an ordinary episode a day in the life of an apostle and it contains everything of what never changes the issues are the same nothing has changed the world and its systems its victims and a church in its midst who can set the captives free because they themselves are not captives because they can be stopped in their success Lord have such a church in this nation with this people and as many as will hear and receive this message this call to be formed

at your hand sons and daughters of obedience by vision, by word by the faintest intimation of your spirit that we could swallow down and ignore what we choose to obey not because of its convenience but for its sacrifice O God the high priest and apostle of our confession have such a church in the earth again in these last days a people of praise not in their comfort and their convenience but in their suffering let your glory be seen and the prison doors burst open and shackles fall for the spirit of liberty where Christ is in the worship of his suffering in the power of his resurrection through the church

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