

The Continuing Work of Christ 04 Messages From the Acts

by Robert Constable

The sermon emphasizes the ongoing work of Christ through the Apostle Paul in spreading the gospel, particularly highlighting the significance of women and the challenges faced in Philippi.

Duration: 49:55

Scripture: Psalm 137:1, Acts 16:13-14, Acts 16:16, Acts 16:18, Acts 16:25-26, Acts 16:33-34

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of trusting in the Lord and His plan, even when we don't understand the circumstances we are facing. The story of Paul's journey to Thessalonica is highlighted, where he receives a new vision and a new opportunity. The speaker also discusses the seriousness of the situation Paul and his companions faced, as they were imprisoned and the jailer contemplated taking his own life. However, a miraculous event occurs, with an earthquake shaking the prison and setting everyone free. The sermon emphasizes the power of God and the transformative impact He can have on individuals and situations.

Transcript

I'd like to congratulate all of you for coming morning by morning, as you have. We've had good meetings together, good crowd together, and real happy time. I think perhaps the Lord has been speaking to our hearts, he has been speaking to mine.

I think the one who has the privilege of the ministry is the one who gets the most out of it, you know, and is a blessed thing indeed. Last night we were discussing the record given to us about the problems that Paul had as he began to move out into the work of God, into the spreading of the gospel to the regions beyond. We had already considered how he had been selected, how he had been prepared, and then how he was sent.

And then, of course, we had understood that he was sent, not in the sense that a human master sends his servant to do something, but that it was Christ going in him. It was Christ himself moving out. It was not just sending somebody else to do his work.

It was the Lord himself doing his work by his Spirit through his servant. You know, this is the essence of the whole matter. We are not called upon to do the work of God in our own weak way.

We are called upon to do the work of God in his gloriously strong way, because it is not us that does it. It is the Lord that does it. And this is a lovely song that we just sang.

I appreciate that song very much. It speaks of the fact that the vessel is nothing. It's the treasure within it.

And although he has put this treasure in earthen vessels, it is that the glory might be of God. And we don't want to get too concerned or to our attention too much on the vessel, even its weakness. What does its weakness matter if it is the Holy Spirit within that is doing the work? That's the important thing.

Sometimes we glory in the weakness of the vessel. I'm no call for that. We're the glory and the strength within.

And so, it was the Apostle Paul, the selected, prepared and sent one of Christ, in whom Christ himself went. And then all kinds of things we read about last night that seemed to get in the way. Cross currents and troubled times and hindrances and problems so far as Paul as a human being was concerned.

He would like to go here, and he gets shoved off there. And then he wants to go somewhere else, and he gets too sick. He has to go some another place.

And then having been there, then he wants to go on north, and he gets shunted to the west. And he doesn't really know what he's supposed to be doing. He winds up in Troas, way out west and across the mountains where he never intended to go at all.

But he's out there. And when he gets there, finds out what God was doing all the time. So often we do that.

We don't understand the circumstances through which we're moving at the time. But if we are committed to the Lord, and he is doing the work, then we may be sure that whether we understand it or whether we don't understand it, he's in charge of things, and he's moving us in the direction of the accomplishment of his purpose and his willingness. And Paul arrives at Troas.

And at Troas, he gets a new vision, and a whole new opportunity is opened up to him. A whole new world is opened up to him. As at Troas, he's given the vision of the man from Macedonia.

Now I want to give you something to think about and talk about a little bit. You know, here on the conference ground, we do a lot of talking to each other, and sometimes maybe wonder what to talk about. I don't think that's really true.

But here's something to talk about. Was Luke the man from Macedonia? Because it is at Troas that Luke joins the party. Now sometimes a vision has been given by the Lord, and it's followed up by a real person.

And it's at Troas that Paul gets the vision. Come over to Macedonia and help us. And from that point on, everything is in the first person plural.

It is now no longer they, it is we. Paul joins the party. And now they are gathering assurance that the Lord indeed has called them to this place and has a new job to be done, and they're ready to do it.

Now we've got to get to the 28th chapter of Acts. And we are here in the 16th chapter of Acts. And we've got one more meeting.

So I suppose the obvious thing would be for me to have gone from the 16th chapter of Acts, let's see, 16 to 28, that's 12, that'd be chapter 22, wouldn't it? Well, we can't do that. Because we have to consider the rest of the 16th chapter. We just must, because of what it says.

Because there's such advance here. So let's turn to chapter 16 of the book of Acts, and verse 11, we'll take right off where we left off last night and see what grew out of this call that Paul received in Troas. Therefore, loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course, that's on ship, to Samothracea, which is an island off the shore, and the next day to Neapolis, and from Neapolis to Philippi.

Now, Neapolis is the harbor town for the city of Philippi. You know, not many cities are actually built right on the coast, very like San Pedro is the port city for Los Angeles, and Jersey City may be for New York, but Neapolis was the port city for the city of Philippi. So, they came there from Neapolis to Philippi.

That's an eight-mile walk, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia and the colony, and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the Sabbath, we went out of the city by a riverside where prayer was wont to be made, and we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

And when she was baptized in her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. She constrained us. It came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with the spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.

The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this she did many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

And he came out the same hour. When her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men being Jews do exceedingly trouble our city and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. When the multitude rose up against them, and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them, and when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

This is as far as we're going to read right now. We may get farther, but this is enough for now. So Paul has left Troas, he's boarded ship and gone across this little arm of the sea there from Asia to Europe, from Troas to Philippi.

He's arrived in the port city of Neapolis. He and Silas and Timothy and Luke, four of them at least, maybe some others, a little party of those who know the Lord Jesus, a little party of people in whom the Spirit of God is resident. It's not much to look at, I suppose, when they got off the ship and walked up the gangplank and into Neapolis, and looked around to which way do you go from here to Philippi.

After all, they'd never been there before. They didn't look particularly prepossessing, or anything special, probably didn't attract much attention. But they were in Europe.

And it says that when they arrived there at Philippi, and we were in that city abiding certain days, it says in verse 12. Now that means that they just tarried there, they took it easy. You know, sometimes we get the notion that in the Lord's work, oh, it's got to be running real hard, and if we're not panting, why, we're not doing the Lord's will.

This is not true. Paul got more done, perhaps, than any other single servant of God in the history of the church. When he moved into Philippi, he just relaxed.

He tarried there certain days. He looked the place over. It was a big city.

It was the chief city of that part of the empire. And it was a colony. This Philippi was the site of the battle between Brutus and Cassius, and Augustus and Mark Antony, after the death of Julius Caesar.

You remember how the empire was torn for a while between those men who aspired to great power. And at this great battle in the Roman world, Mark Antony and Augustus won, and Brutus and Cassius were killed in this battle. But as a result of the winning of this battle, Philippi was made a colony.

Now, to be a colony of Rome had a certain special significance. It wasn't a colony in the sense in which we usually think of it. You know, we think of a place as a colony where some people go out and they settle in the area.

They go of their own will, and they just sort of get established. They set up their own government and so on. They may or they may not report back home.

This isn't a Roman colony. In a Roman colony, there was a group of selected people sent out, and all the government procedures and practices and the way of life and everything was imposed upon the city from Rome. It became a little Rome.

That's what a colony is in the sense in which it's spoken of in the New Testament. Now, Paul says, I must see Rome also. He got to that conviction, not because he was a good tourist and wanted to see the city, but because he has a taste of Rome here.

Paul has been selecting centers out of which the gospel may run, and Philippi was the chief city of this part. And all the roads, the Roman roads, ran out of Philippi all through this part of Macedonia, this part of the empire which was Macedonia. And then we know the saying, don't we, that all roads lead to Rome.

Well, all roads also led away from Rome. And having been in Philippi, his vision is lifted and he says, I must get to Rome too. This is a technique that Paul is using.

The strategy he is following is hit the centers and then the gospel will go out from the centers into all the world. And he is carrying on a strategic missionary work. Well, at Philippi now, he has arrived in Europe.

Twenty years have passed since Pentecost. Twenty years. Paul has had his first great missionary journey.

The church has grown and multiplied. It has moved from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and out to the cities round about. These Grecian cities have all been evangelized.

Now there are assemblies in many of them. Churches have been established. God has been working.

The world hasn't been paying much attention to it really. There have been little groups here, little groups there. God has been working as this thing begins to move out.

And now Paul arrives at Philippi and plants a flag on the beachhead there. This flag is going to fly over Rome. This is just the beginning.

Not many knew that Paul arrived. He didn't send forward 20,000 folders announcing that he would be in Philippi arriving as of the Sabbath on such a day. No, he just went with his friends to Philippi and spent a few days looking the place over.

But they were there with God and they had a small beginning. And little did the people in charge in Philippi or in Rome have any idea that this was the vanguard of an army of the ultimate conqueror taking possession of a frontal defense. Paul moving into Philippi was the beginning of Rome coming down.

They were looking for marching conquerors with armies. They'd established this fort at Philippi to ward off the enemy of Rome, the soldiers, the barbarians. Little did they know when this little party moved into Philippi that into Philippi had moved that force that would bring the empire down.

But that's what happened. That's why I couldn't pass this. This is an important place.

And they walked around the city and they talked about things and looked probably for a synagogue. And they didn't find any synagogue in Philippi. They always went to the synagogues, you know, to meet their people first, the Jewish people.

When they got over into Europe, there was no synagogue in Philippi. Very few Jews in Philippi as a matter of fact. So they just looked around.

They were eventually going to lower Rome's flag and change the history of the world as the result of this little visit. They didn't know this. The Lord knew it.

And, you know, it's an interesting thing to think about the Lord looking at this situation. Seeing Paul and his little party come into Philippi and thinking, how little those people know what I'm doing. How little they know what's going to come of this.

And as I said last night, how little we do know of the issues that are involved in the Lord's moving with his people. And into little situations. Now this story that we're reading this morning centers about a couple of women.

And, you know, we've been talking about empire and bringing down the flag and the vanguard of the conquering army and all of this. And we're apt to get thinking in masculine terms, aren't we? And of course, in the world in which we're thinking, it was a man's world then. Believe me, I've heard some of the ladies say it's a man's world now.

But it was much more a man's world then. Women weren't too much considered. But it's women that get involved at the beginning of the invasion in Europe.

You know, you would sort of have expected that Paul would have gone in here and that the man, the governor of the town would have been saved. That really would have brought the place down, you know?

That isn't the way the Lord works. He isn't just to make an impression.

He has his way of getting things done. So the story centers about two women, Lydia, a seller of purple, a businesswoman, and a maid who had a spirit of divination. Two women.

Now the first victory that was won in the city of Philippi was one in the open heart of a woman. And the other victory was over Satan in his two-pronged attack against the church, alliance and antagonism. These are the two ways that the devil hit the church in Philippi when Paul came there.

You know, the devil could see some potentials in this, even if he couldn't. And he was out to smash this thing before it gets started. He knows a beachhead is being established here.

He isn't going to let this go without making a fuss about it. And so he makes a fuss about it, and we're going to read about that. We're going to think about that.

Now the capture of the vantage ground came as Paul walked around and surveyed the city, got to know some of the people, and then lo and behold, the Sabbath day came. Well, there was no synagogue to go to. And so it says here that on the Sabbath day, we went out of the city by a riverside where prayer was wont to be made, and we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

Now look back at the 137th Psalm. Psalm 137, verse 1. Remember now that we are in a European city, not a Jewish city, or European city. In Psalm 137, it says, By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.

By the rivers of Babylon. When the people of God were in captivity and had been carried away, there was only one place where they could get together. They couldn't have a synagogue in their new place.

They were carried away captive. No, but they could meet out by the river. And traditionally and down through history since the 137th Psalm was written, they'd been meeting by the riverside from time to time.

And it says in our verse here, where prayer was wont to be made. Now what that really means is where it was legal for them to meet. This had been given to them or allowed to them as a place for meeting where they could pray.

This town is ruled by a very strong, closely knit hierarchy. The Roman Empire. Nobody did anything without permission.

They had permission to meet by the river. But there was only a little group of women that met there. There weren't any men around.

If there were Jews in Philippi, they weren't interested in the Lord's things, particularly, apparently. Just a group of ladies met together by the river there to pray and to talk about the Lord. And we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted to there.

Now here's a group of ladies, eastern ladies, gathered together by the river outside the city, talking about the things of God. And along come these strangers, these men, four of them at least, and they join themselves to them, and the Apostle Paul begins to talk to them. These are Jewish women.

They are believers in the Hebrew religion. They know nothing of Christ. They know nothing of Christianity.

They are devout women whose hearts are turned toward God. And because they have been faithful in what they do know, and in the revelation that has been given to them, God is sending the further revelation. He has sent his servant to this group.

And here's Paul the Pharisee, the student of Gamaliel, the man who had such a wonderful intellect, this man who had such powerful ability to preach and to lay down the foundations doctrinally of the whole Christian faith. This man of such tremendous ability is sitting here with a few women and telling them about the Lord Jesus. Now, he didn't think it was too small a meeting for him.

He was glad to meet with these ladies, and he talked to them. And the Lord opened the heart of one of the businesswomen. Now, she was an Asian woman.

She wasn't a European woman. She came from the city of Thyatira, which is in our present Turkey, and she was over in Philippi. She apparently lived there, because she invited them into her house.

But she sold purple, and she was an Asian woman who lived in this town. And so she believed. Well, great day.

We've been considering when Peter preached, three thousand believed. On another occasion, five thousand believed. There were added multitudes to the church.

We're accustomed to this kind of a movement. And yet, perhaps, we haven't read anything yet in the book of Acts as significant as this. But this woman, this businesswoman, opened her heart to the Lord.

This was the vantage ground God needed. That's all he needed to start with. Now, he'd gone into the city.

Paul hadn't arranged for his accommodations. He was probably staying at a reasonable motel in the place with his friends. But now she isn't going to let this happen.

She said, if you think I have been faithful, if you think that I have responded as I ought to the message you've brought, I can't let you stay down in that place. Come to my house and so they moved into her house. She constrained them.

Now, you get something of the atmosphere and the feeling there was here in Philippi as this work begins. In the letter to the Philippians, turn to the Philippian letter, chapter one, just for a quick little reference here that gives us something of the atmosphere of the place. In chapter one of Philippians, in verse three, it says this, I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.

You know what's in that verse? All that we're talking about now. Paul is thinking about the few days rest he had there in the city. He's thinking about going out by the river and meeting with these ladies in this little meeting together and having such a good time.

And the Lord opened Lydia's heart and now has begun the work in Philippi. And he said, you know, every time I think about that, it makes me glow inside. I thank God upon every remembrance of you.

Now, chapter four and verse 15. That's how he felt. Now, how did they feel? Listen to this.

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, that is when we first started this together, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. This Lydia, believe me, her heart was in it. She not only invited them into the house,

but the kind of influence she exerted made the assembly, when Paul left Macedonia, follow him up and say, how are things going where you are? Are you being cared for properly? Let's have a gift for you so you can get along.

We want to share in the work. They were the only assembly that did that, incidentally. The only group of Christians that were concerned enough to follow him up after he left Macedonia to see that he was properly cared for, perfectly in the spirit of what Lydia did.

Well, subsequent history is the testimony as to the value to God of the open heart of one. Subsequent history, the development of the assembly in Philippi, the ongoing of the apostle into other areas in Europe, his final arrival at Rome, the bringing down of Rome, under the preaching of the gospel and the outreaches to the ends of the earth, started in Lydia's heart. Now, if that is true, what might not God do in the heart of some woman here this morning, or some man? Do you think Lydia had any idea about this? Do you think if we had said to Lydia, you know, now that you have believed the gospel and invited Paul into your house, the result of this is going to be the bringing down of the Roman empire and the waving of the flag of Christ over the empire, over the known world, and the outreach from Rome to the ends of the earth? Why, she said, you're off.

Maybe you think that, too. It's very easy for us to get this idea that we don't amount to anything. I don't think Lydia thought she amounted to anything particular.

But that wasn't the point. The treasure is in earthen vessels, that the glory might be God's. Isn't that the great thing? That in each one of us, men and women, God has chosen each one of us as a beachhead from which he wants to move to victories beyond all our thinking or imagination.

All right, that's the one woman. Now, there's another woman involved in the story here. Let's take a look at her.

Verse 16, And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her master's much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation. Isn't that great? I mean, this woman was, you know, I mean, she was made something of.

She probably was pretty well cared for. She brought much gain to her masters. I hope they shared a little of it with her.

But they used her. She had the spirit of divination, and they were making their pile off of her spirit of divination. And she was well known in the community, no doubt.

And so this group of a few men and those that had attached themselves to them in Philippi are walking along the street, and they meet this woman. And she's with her masters, and they're walking along, and she looks over at them and sees them. And by her spirit of divination, she recognized who they were.

And she turned to them, and she said, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation. Isn't that great? I mean, that's true, isn't it? These men were the servants of the Most High God. They did come to show unto the Philippians the way of salvation.

Right? Right? Well then, isn't that great? Why do we read in the very next verse, And this she did many days, but Paul being grieved. Why is he grieved? This is great publicity. You couldn't buy this for love or

money.

You know? This ought to get the word around and make people sit up and take notice. And this word, Paul is grieved here, means he was terribly upset by this. The first time it happened, I suppose he sort of brushed it off, you know, and thought, Well, I hope that doesn't happen again.

But the second day, she comes up with the same thing when she meets them on the street, and it bothers him more. The next day is, Here's this woman again, and she's saying the same thing. And there may be those that thought this is wonderful.

Well, there. Remember, it happened over on State Street yesterday. Now it's happening on Rockwell Street, and tomorrow on Turner Road.

The word is getting all over town that we are the servants of the Most High God, which bring unto Philippi the words of salvation. Isn't this good? You know, you think it was good the way some people talk today. But my Bible says, and I cannot get past this, that Paul, being greatly upset, turned and said to the Spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

Then I take it that Paul didn't like it. Wouldn't you gather that impression, someone? Well, what kind of a queer is he, anyway? Well, it's just because he runs so much against sometimes the way we think. When the devil tells the truth about the church, there is a peril created.

Believe me, there's bound to be trouble. The notion that the truth must win whoever utters it is a lie. That is not a true statement.

Some people have got the idea that it doesn't matter who utters the truth. If it is the truth, the truth will win. No, this isn't so.

This was the devil. This was the devil motivating this girl. And the devil was telling the truth in order to destroy the testimony.

And this is the first way the devil does move in. Whenever there is a new testimony, a new effort for the Lord Jesus, it's by being buddy-buddy. You know, let's join up with him.

Let's get together. Alliance is the first thing. And the whole idea was, these are the servants of the Most High God who have come to show us the way of salvation.

And let's all be happy about this, and let's all be together about this. And the work of the devil and the work of the Lord can go on hand-in-hand together here in Philippi, and we can get something done. You know, this has a somewhat familiar ring, and we need to be real careful of this.

This idea that the devil and the Lord can work hand-in-hand, and that we ought to appreciate the help that the world is willing to give the Church. When we start appreciating the help that the world can give the Church, we're headed for trouble. And Paul knew it.

And Paul wasn't having any of this. He turned around and rebuked the Spirit and demanded the Spirit leave him. After all, the demons told the truth about the Lord Jesus, too, when he was here on earth, and he wouldn't have any part of it.

He told them to keep quiet. God will have no testimony of truth that is not spoken by those who are true. He's not interested in a profession.

He's not interested in the mouthing of the truth. He is only interested in the truth as it is proclaimed by those who are true. Otherwise, it's destructive.

Well, Satan failed in this little gambit that he tried. He tried moving in and pushed Paul aside by, you know, sort of acceptance and alliance. It didn't work.

Paul wasn't having any part of it. And so right away we read, And when our masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. Why didn't they say what the truth was when they brought the charge? Why didn't they say, These men have come and ruined our business? Well, nobody cared about their business, you know.

So what do they do? They bring the one charge that would be a serious charge in Philippi. Philippi is a Roman fort, a Roman colony, and it is to be Roman. And anything that was brought into that city that would seem to deemphasize the Roman is wrong.

And the rulers of the city would be very sensitive to this. You know, the one charge that could get back to Rome that could ruin them politically, and so far as their jobs were concerned, was that something else had moved in and weakened the Roman influence. And so these fellows know this, and so they drag the men in before the magistrates, and they say, They are teaching customs which are not lawful to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

And so Paul and Silas and his friends are thrown into jail. Well, they're thrown in is right. The multitude rose up together against them.

That is, they gave their vote against them. The magistrates tore their clothes off, that's the clothes off of these men, and commanded them to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely.

Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. Big victory, huh? Looks great. What do you mean a big victory? Paul's in jail with his friends.

Where is the victory here? The victory is here. That's going on. And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard him.

You put a man in prison for Christ's sake, and the work will spread. Don't shut anything up by putting a cork on that bottle. They're in prison, and they are put in the inner prison, and their feet are put in stocks, and they're chained down.

And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard him. What kind of a thing is it? I'll bet you that prison never had anybody singing it before or since. But these men were praising God, singing the Psalms at midnight in the inner prison, where it was blacker than the inside of a cat.

And just here they are, in pain and agony. They've been beaten with many strikes of bloody, lying on the floor, their feet in stocks, chains on their wrists, and singing praise to God. You know, there's nothing that God can do.

The life of God in his people will overcome anything. Though they have bleeding backs, they've got joy inside. The other prisoners are listening.

Now, one thing I would like to comment on here, and that is that they're singing before they're delivered, not after. You know, I could understand their singing at two o'clock, but not at midnight. This is before the delivery, and it has to do with the power of the Spirit of Christ to make his people sing while they are in the bitterness of their circumstances.

The devil can make his people sing after the deliverance, but only the Lord makes his people sing in the circumstance. That's what happened here. But he not only has the power to make his people sing and to overcome the bitterness of their circumstances while they're in them, but he also has the power to deliver them from the circumstances when he gets good and ready.

And so it goes on to say, 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 bands were loose. Who are we talking about here? We are talking about the Lord God Almighty. We are talking about Jesus Christ working in the lives of men.

We're talking about the power of the Holy Spirit of God that possesses men, that can deliver them in the circumstances and can deliver them out of the circumstances when the time is right. This is the kind of God that sent us forth. Well, that has to do with the witnesses and God.

But what about this jailer and the keeper of the prison, awaking out of his sleep? This fellow has been asleep. Isn't that an interesting thing? He lays on many stripes on these poor men. He drags them into the inner prison.

He locks their feet in stocks and puts the chains on their arms and throws them on the floor and goes to sleep. Nice guy, huh? No, here's a brutalized man, the way the devil makes him. Here is a monster, and he's been turned loose on the men of God, and he has his way with them.

But he, awaking out of his sleep and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing the prisoners had been fled. Now, this shows you something of the seriousness of what was going on, you know? I mean, everybody doesn't decide to kill himself over every little incident that happens. But this fellow knew he was in trouble.

He was in real trouble in view of the charge he had from the magistrates to keep these fellows safe. He thinks, of course they're gone. Paul, I don't know how he saw this.

When you're deep in the hole, you know, you can see what's going on outside pretty easily, even at night. And he sees what's going on. He says, hold it, hold it, take it easy.

We're all here. And the man comes in and falls on his face and says, Sir, Sir, what must I do to be safe? There's no evangel in that. He's not asking how he's going to have his soul saved for eternity.

He's asking how he's going to get out of the mess he's in. How am I going to be delivered? But the answer he got has all the evangel in it. The answer has the gospel in it.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll not only be delivered out of this mess, but you'll be delivered out of anything else, too. And so Paul goes with him then and they spake unto him the word of the Lord and to all that were in his house. That is great.

He took them up into the house and Paul sits down at the table with his friends and with the family of the jailer. And they have a wonderful meeting together while he tells them of God's will to bless them, that he'd love to bless this jailer and not only deliver them out of this trouble, but any trouble and save him forever and take him to glory. What an evening that was.

I'll bet you they didn't sleep after that. No, sir. So it says there, and he took them the same hour of the night and he washed their stripes.

This is the fellow that was laying it on a little while ago. Oh, what tenderness he must have used in washing these stripes. Oh, how he must have said, I wish I had known.

Oh, and he cleansed their backs and cleaned them all up and put the ointment on that would help them to heal. Isn't this what the gospel does to a brutalized man? Turns him into a nurse. Yeah, changing them all together, completely around.

Instead of a brutal jailer, he's a tender nurse to these people. When he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, no meat before, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his heart. Salvation had come to that place.

Praise the Lord. Well, it's a great story. It's a great story.

Well, we haven't got through with everybody. We've got the witnesses and Paul. We've got the witnesses and the jailer.

We still have the magistrates to think about, don't we? What about these fellows? Now the charge was made that these men had come into town strangers, and they were teaching customs that it was not lawful for the Romans to observe. And did you observe what happened? Without any trial, the magistrates took these men, stripped them, beat them with many stripes, and threw them into the inner prison. Is this Roman justice? This isn't Roman justice.

Apart from this occasion, Paul had nothing to complain about so far as Roman justice is concerned. Roman justice in all Paul's journeys is one of the things that supported him, and maintained him, and kept him safe. God used the Roman system of justice to protect Paul through much of his ministry.

This is the only break-over that I can think of. Not right for us to do being Romans? Wait a minute. What happens now? When it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants saying, let those men go.

There's sort of a sneer in the those here. Let those characters out of here. You know, it's great what a night's sleep will do for you.

And I guess these magistrates, they were responsible people, and they got to thinking they'd been carried away the night before. And this really wasn't Roman justice. They had gotten involved, and they sort of participated in the mob scene.

Maybe we better shut this thing off altogether. And so they sent the officers and said, let these characters go. Boy, here is where they got a jolt.

Here's where they got a jolt. I love this passage. But Paul said to them, they have beaten us openly, uncondemned being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privately? Nothing doing.

Let them come themselves and fetch us out. Oh brother. You know, they didn't know, not only were not anxious to run out when the gates were open, they wouldn't go out when they were invited.

And this word came to the magistrates. This word. They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans.

You can just hear these Romans. We didn't know they were Romans. Why didn't somebody tell us they were Romans? Now we are in trouble.

They were in trouble, too. They had taken Roman citizens and beaten them publicly without trial. They were in real trouble now.

And you may believe they knew they were in real trouble, because instead of saying, who do they think they are, kick them out, they went down and they were real nice to these fellas. And they invited them, won't you please come out of jail. We're real sorry for what we did here.

You know, mistakes can happen to anybody and we're awful. You know, those fellas that make the money off the maid, well, they're no good anyway. We should have known this to start with.

You can just hear the whole lingo. They apologize and scrape and bow and try to get Paul to get out of this jail. Yeah.

Well, that's the way the Lord does. It's the Lord taking care of these men. The Lord going with them.

You know, Paul hadn't mentioned the fact that he was a Roman before, and he didn't mention that now to save his own skin. I mean, he could have gone out of the jail without saying anything, but he was thinking of that little group of believers that he was going to leave in the city of Philippi, Lydia, maybe some of the other women whose hearts the Lord opened, the jailers in his household. How were they going to be treated after Paul left Philippi? Well, it would depend on how Paul conducted himself while he was in Philippi.

And he wanted to make real sure they were going to get a square deal. And so he claimed his Roman citizenship and said, you ought to be more careful in this town before you jump on people. He left a nice environment for the assembly to grow in.

When the day is darkest and the prison bars are the firmest, that's the time for the song. And the rest of the story tells us God cannot be overcome, be it by alliance, be it by antagonism, or by any other means. The God who dwells within us is victorious, and he leads us on to the accomplishment of the conquering of Rome.

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