

Sunday May 12, 2024

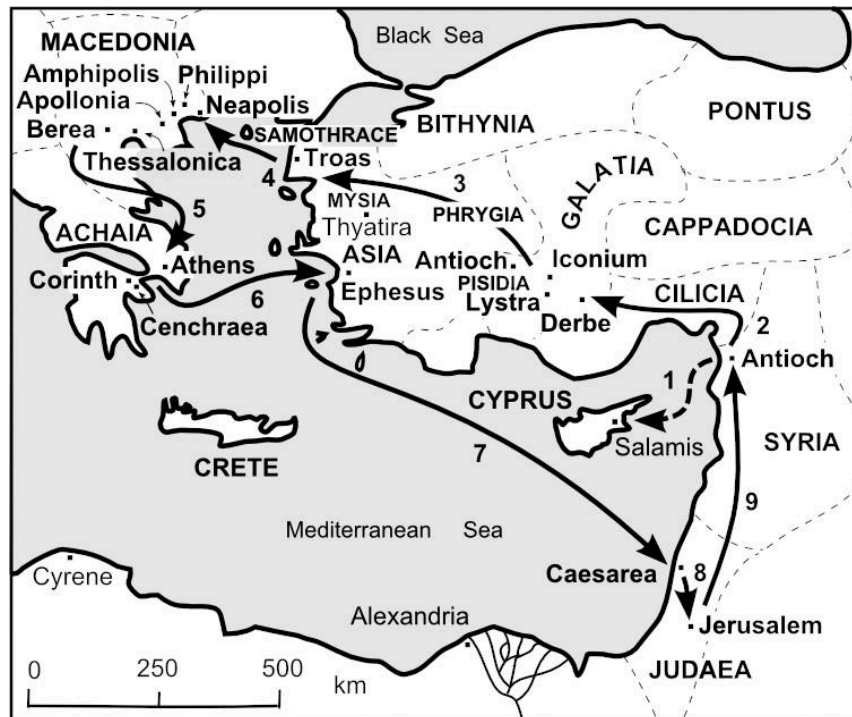
Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Acts 16:11-40

Sermon Title: Belief Changes Things

Transcribed by: Liza Perry

We gather this morning to worship God and to hear from God. And today, we are going to continue hearing from God in Acts, as he has been showing us how he has been developing his church. So I invite you to turn to Acts 16 where we will continue. We've been on a journey now with Paul, who has gone through his first missionary journey.



So Paul started in Antioch. And we saw him go a little while ago up through the area in Galatia. Last week, he came back to the Galatia area and he wanted to go east. And God said no. He wanted to go north. And God said no. And then he ended up in Troas, and while he was in Troas, he saw a vision of a man who was inviting him over to the area of Macedonia.

So today we see him go through Samothrace and then the Neapolis and then we'll end up in Philippi here this morning. And that is where today's message occurs. So we start in Acts 16:11 and we'll follow on with the story and the proceedings of Paul as he is in the city of Phillippi. And we'll see what God does there.

Lydia's Conversion in Philippi

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. **12** From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. **13** On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. **14** One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. **15** When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Paul and Silas in Prison

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. **17** She 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 annoyed 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 her owners 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 with rods. **23** After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. **24** When he received these 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 everyone's chains came loose. **27** The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. **28** But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. **30** He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” **31** They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. **33** At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. **34** The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” **36** The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.” **37** But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. **39** They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. **40** After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your Word. Lord, we thank you that your Word is living and active. And even though these stories happened many years ago, Lord, they still have messages for us today. Lord, I pray that you will open our ears. Lord, as you did with Lydia, open our hearts, that we may hear you and see you and believe. Lord, may the words I speak be your words and may nothing of me come out, Lord. For we've come to hear you. To your name, be the honor and glory. Amen.

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As I said before, we are in Paul's journey now. The second one of his missionary journeys. And he has sailed away from the area of Galatia into the area of Macedonia. And it says there at the beginning, that they sailed and set sea, and the next day they were there. So this was just a two day journey, which means something about God leading them there. Because for you to sail that distance in two days is quite good because later on when we see Paul sail back in Acts 20, we'll see that it took him five days because the winds were against him. So obviously he had favorable winds and he got there quickly.

He ends up in this city called Philippi. And Luke mentions here - and this is the only place where Luke mentions it - is that Philippi is a Roman colony. It is a city which lives by the rules of Rome and does things in the way any Roman city would. And so this is an intentional place of God saying, "We are moving out into other areas." Now remember, Paul as he was waiting and going places, received this vision of a man in Macedonia inviting him to come over. So now he comes to the city of Philippi. And in the city of Philippi on the Sabbath, you would think as he would in any other city that he went to, that he would go to the synagogue. But there is no synagogue in Philippi and they're never established a synagogue in Philippi. In order to have a synagogue, you have to have at least ten men. So that means in the city of Philippi, there were less than ten men who were God-fearers and Jews.

So on the morning of the Sabbath, he goes to a place outside the city by a river bank. And it's important that you go to a river bank because one of the rituals within a Sabbath service for a Jew was, when they would get together, they would go through what was called a mikvah, which is a bath, and they would bathe themselves. But one of the things about a mikvah is that it had to have water coming in and water going out. It's not like a bathtub which we have nowadays where you fill it up and it's just still water. A mikvah was a bath which had water coming in and going out.

Do you remember when Jesus met the woman at the well? And he said, "If you ask me, I will give you living water." That is the term they use for the water within a mikvah. It is living water because it moves. It is life. And so Paul goes to a river just outside the city thinking this is where Jews will come and bathe and pray. And so he gets there. There are a group of women and this group of women are gathered there in prayer. Do you notice what the first thing that happens in the city of Philippi is? It's prayer. The work that God is doing in the city of Philippi begins at a prayer meeting.

And here Paul speaks to these women. And it says in **Acts 16:14**, "**14** One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth." For us today, it would be, "Great. She sells purple clothes. Other people sell blue jeans. You know, whatever." But you have to understand that at that time, purple was a very rare dye for clothing. And so it was; therefore, very expensive. Which is why at that time, you often hear of royalty wearing purple because common people could never afford purple. And for those of you wearing purple today, bless you. You are royalty.

But Lydia, a dealer in purple, means two things. One: she had a wealthy clientele. And two: she was probably wealthy herself. This is because, in order to afford to have a business of selling purple, you had to have significant funds in order to purchase the dye and to purchase the cloth. So Lydia is a very well off woman, a very good businesswoman. And she hears Paul and she responds by saying that she believes. And then she says, "Paul, I would like to offer you a place to stay. I want you to stay at my house."

Now this must have taken some persuading because Paul, as you may recognize when you go through his journeys and you listen to his letters, he never wants to be a burden on anybody. And so he was a tentmaker. He would do his own work so he could raise his own money. He didn't want to go into the city and be taken care of by other people. He wanted to make sure that he was self-sufficient so that the gospel could be preached.

But notice her line that she gives to Paul, Silas, Luke, Timothy, and anybody else who went with them. So this isn't just one person she's inviting over. This is the whole team. She says in Acts 16:15, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." How do you respond to that? Right? "If you think I'm a believer, come and stay with me." Which is another way to say, "If you don't come and stay with me, you don't think I'm a believer." So Lydia has taken what her faith has led her to where she has now said to Paul, "Look, God has called me to help you and to be hospitable to you, and to house you so that you have a place to stay."

Notice what it says about Lydia beforehand. In **Acts 16:14**, the last sentence there, it says, "**14** The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." It's the work of the Lord. And the Lord worked in Lydia's heart, not only to respond to the Lord's message but in that response to the Lord's message, the Lord also through Lydia opened the door for Paul to have a place to stay.

So Paul and his team stayed with Lydia. They spend the days walking through town, talking to people about the Lord. So they're going to a place of prayer - which we read on - and there's a slave girl who has a spirit in her. Now within this phrase, it seems like she has a spirit in her where she predicted the future. The Greek actually uses the term that she has a spirit from python, which is where we get the word python. And Python was with Apollo. And Apollo was the Greek god in that area. So this isn't just a spirit, but it is a spirit of the gods of the demonic.

And notice what she says in **Acts 16:17**, where she says, "**17** These men are servants of the Most High God..." Even the demons recognized the position of God as the most high God. It's a phrase which is not used often in scriptures, but there is a time in the Old Testament where Abraham comes up to Melchizedek. And Melchizedek is known as the priest of the Most High God, which places God above all other demonic or all other gods. And this girl is telling people, "People who are telling you about the Most High God, listen to them, and you will be saved."

Now you're thinking, "Wow, that's pretty cool. The demons are advertising for God. This should be good news." And then you read on and you see that Paul gets kind of annoyed by this person after a few days. He turns around and he says, "In the name of Jesus Christ, get out." A couple of things here. First of all, notice how Paul responds. Paul doesn't say, "I tell you, get out." Paul doesn't say, "It's time to go now. Let's have a discussion about the theology on this and we'll figure out a way to set you straight." But he simply says, "In the name of Jesus, you have to leave." Which shows us also that Jesus is the most high God because Jesus is in charge of all of the spiritual realm. And if Jesus says to anyone within the spiritual realm, "You have to leave," they have to leave. And so there was power in the name of Jesus.

And there's a second part here. God doesn't need the demonic to do his advertising. God speaks for himself. God speaks for himself and creation. God speaks for himself in the way he works in people's lives.

As we heard last week as the new members came and shared their stories about what they were doing and how God has worked in their lives, we see God working. God works and he opens people's hearts. And he says, "Here I am. Let me tell you about me."

Now this girl was a fortune teller. She was making money for these people. And as soon as their economic bank got shut down, trouble occurred. So they began to stir everything up and get Paul and Silas in trouble. They brought him forward and at that point, they were stripped and beaten with rods. You may have heard a few years ago about people being caned. Right? It's that same thing.

Now in Jewish culture, there is actually a safety measure, that you may only beat someone so many times. And after that point, it has to stop. In Roman culture, not so much. So we don't know how badly Paul and Silas were beaten but they were beaten badly. And then they were told to be put into jail. And it says that the jailer brought them to the inner cell in **Acts 16:24**. When he received the orders, he brought them to the inner cell and fastened their feet in stocks.

So a jail at that point has an outer wall which has cells in it. It has a middle section and then it has an intersection. It's kind of like solitary confinement in the very middle so it's hard to get out. And that's where the jailer put them. And then he put his feet in stocks. And you know what stocks are. Where you put your feet in and they get locked. You can't move them. Typically what they would do is they would spread them apart so it's very awkward and painful. And they would sit them up against the wall.

So now Paul's back, which is all torn up from the beating, would be against the outside rock wall, in stocks so he can't move, and there he sits and waits. And then it says in **Acts 16:25**, "**25** About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns... "

Here's the situation Paul is in. It doesn't get much worse than this. And there he is praying and singing. And it's midnight. And it says that the other prisoners were listening to him. Which means that Paul and Silas are probably singing pretty loud. Because at midnight, most people are sleeping. But he's waking up the prisoners in the inner cell by his singing and his praising. And then there's an earthquake. They have to know that an earthquake like that doesn't happen in Philippi very often. In fact, there are very few times where there's been an earthquake in Philippi.

There's an earthquake that's strong enough to open all the doors and to loosen all the chains. The jailer, because of this earthquake, obviously wakes up and he sees the doors open. His first thought is, "I'm a dead man." Because the rule was this... If you were guarding somebody as a jailer and that person escaped, whatever their punishment was, was going to be given to you.

So in this case, Paul and Silas were likely going to be killed and so the jailer understood, "The people in my care - whatever happens to them - will happen to me. So rather than just be tortured, I'm just going to get it over with and I'm going to kill myself." But Paul may have heard the sword come out of the sheath yells out in Acts 16:28, "28 Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

Last week, we talked about God opening and closing doors. Thinking to myself, I would be going, "This is one of those times when God opened doors and we can go!" He probably knows the story of Peter who was in jail and the angel brought him out of jail. And he's thinking, "Here God goes again."

But they don't move. And here's the amazing thing. None of the other prisoners move either. They all stay there. I don't know whether Paul said to them, "Hey, guys, the doors are open, but just stay and wait. You'll be okay." But they don't move. God is working in their hearts that they see that even in this time, God is protecting them as well.

And so the jailer comes running down to the middle cell and he says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" At this point, Paul pulls out his laptop and says, "Well, let's see. We first need a course in biblical theology. Then we need to read the Old Testament and really understand what it means. And then we need..." No, that's not what he does. All he says is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

Do you ever think sometimes we make it too difficult? If we look at Lydia, it simply says that Lydia believed. When we look at the jailer, it simply says, "The jailer believed." The jailer was willing to say, "I am going to put my trust in a God who protects. I'm willing to put my trust in a God whose people understand who is in charge, and who rules over everything." A God of light, a God of love, a God of mercy, a God of justice.

So Paul and Silas go to his house and his entire house believes in the Lord. And then, Paul - we don't know why and we don't know how - but we see that the next morning, Paul and Silas are back in prison. You would think, "Hold on, we've been released. We're with the Philippian jailer. Why don't we stay there?" Or, "We could always go back to Lydia's house. That'll work."

But they go back. And the next morning, the magistrates come to their senses and they realize, "We really messed up here. So we're going to let them go." And so they tell the jailer, "You can open the doors. You can let them go." And so the jailer comes back to Paul and Silas and says, "Hey, you're allowed to leave. Go on." Paul says, "No. Hold on. We need to remember something and we need to recognize something." Acts 16:37, "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens..."

This put fear in all of them because a Roman citizen was not allowed to be beaten without a trial. And you might think to yourself, "Paul, you didn't become a Roman citizen while you were in jail. You were a Roman citizen before they started beating you. Why, when they pulled out the

rods, didn't you say, "Hold on, hold on, guys. Just so you know, I'm a Roman citizen. This isn't really allowed. Maybe we should talk this over."

It could have saved you a lot of pain. It could have saved you a night in jail. It would have been a whole lot easier for you. Why did you let them do this? Who was Paul looking out for?

He's looking out for the Jews in the city. He is looking out for the believers. Because now, by allowing himself to be beaten and by allowing himself to be in jail for a night... #1 - God used him to save the Philippian jailer and his household but #2 - When the magistrates realize that the Jews were not the ones stirring up the city, now it's not because Paul is a Roman citizen. Now it has provided safety for all the Jews and the Christians who live there. Because now the people know that it's not the Jewish people that are causing the problems.

Think about our world today. Christians are well loved while they help society... like Lydia. But as soon as they start speaking against anything that is economic, or philosophically against what the Word says, suddenly they become the problem. The Christians become the problem. And we can learn from Paul here that it's not about us personally. It's, "What about the Kingdom of God? What is God asking me to stand up for within our society as we live for him?" And not necessarily claim my rights, but understand who I am in living for him.

So Paul and Silas are released, and they're asked to leave. And there they go. But there's a few things that we can learn from this message. Do you remember Paul and Silas singing in prison? **Philippians 4:4-7** says this, "**4** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** reads, "**16** Rejoice always, **17** pray continually, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Paul reminds us that in those places of hardship when we give thanks, when we praise, God's peace will be there. That doesn't necessarily mean an earthquake will happen and all the doors will open and everything will be grand. But it does mean God is there.

Now we need to go back to the story and think about Paul for a moment. Paul was a Jew. He was a Pharisee. He understood life as a Jew. As a male Jew. He grew up with a prayer every morning. And John Stott and his writings on this reminds us of this because a Jewish prayer was this every morning for a male Jew. "Dear Lord, thank you for a new day. Thank you that I am not a Gentile, a woman, or a slave."

Paul got called to Macedonia by a man. And when he gets to Philippi, he meets a woman slave and a Gentile. Those are the first three people whom God opened their hearts in the city of Philippi to respond to the message. Which reminds us that as God is working in the hearts of those around us, we never know who they are. And we don't know who God will place in our path that we may simply say when they ask, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

1 Peter 3:15-17 says, "**15** But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, **16** keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. **17** For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

We remember that God works through us. And we don't know to whom God will work through us next but we need to be ready to answer that. And when we think about who's doing this and who is working, we go back to Paul's comment to the woman who was demonically possessed, which simply says, "In the name of Jesus, get out."

So it is in Christ alone that we are able to do all of this. I would like to invite the praise team to come on up. And we are going to close in prayer in just a moment and sing, "In Christ alone." But I also want you to remember, "Where did this begin?" When we look at the story, we see two things that are evident. It begins with a prayer meeting. And so if we want to see things changed in Peterborough, we need to begin with prayer and gathering together for prayer. Hearing the word of God through Paul and then singing and singing out loud.

I walk in the mornings. When I walk and there's nobody close by, I sing. As they get closer, my voice goes down. Maybe I need to keep it up. When I was younger and at home and I was cutting the grass, I would sing. Little did I know, the lawnmower did not cover my voice. And my mom would tell me that she could hear me singing and it brought music to her ears. And one of the songs which I frequently sang is, "How great thou Art."

"When through the woods and forest glades I wander, And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees. My soul remains and sings, 'My God, how Great Thou Art.'"

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your greatness. Lord, we thank you that you are the God Most High. And Lord, that you work in our hearts and you open our hearts to hear you and to see you. Lord, we pray that you will increase our faith in You. And Lord, may we always know that it is in Christ alone that we live and stand. In Jesus' name. Amen.