

SERIES: While Going - Week 2

By Pastor Bryan Clark

Message Title: Some Truths You Need to Know Pt. 2

Release Date: Friday 3/27/20

Verse 16,

It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out at that very moment.

But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.”

The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order *them* to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. (NASB, Acts 16:16-24)

In this particular story, there is a slave girl who's possessed by a demon and there are a group of men who have figured out a way to profit from her calamity. So they use her for themselves. She ends up following Paul and Silas around and actually what she says is very good: These people represent the Most High God and are proclaiming His salvation. And whenever somebody reads this text, the first thing they say is, what's the problem with that? There's no problem with that. It's actually a really good message. The problem is that the people knew this was a slave girl who is possessed by a demon. So every time this message comes out of her mouth, it is discrediting the message. And so she is just making it more and more difficult for people to believe the message is legitimate. The text says Paul finally got so annoyed, he turns around and he cast the demon out and the girl is set free.

Now, I would suggest to you this is a big problem. Under the umbrella of Christianity, there are people, individuals, churches, who say the right words, but because of how they live, because of their lifestyle, because of how they behave, because of how they say it, it tends to discredit the message, and it's not helpful at all. Just because somebody is using the right words doesn't mean that message has credibility. And sometimes we find ourselves thinking it would be very helpful if you'd really just be quiet, because you're not really helping the cause very much. Well, that's a similar thing that Paul's dealing with. So now this slave girl has been miraculously set free. But the problem is, this group of men who've been making a profit, by taking advantage of her very difficult situation, now no longer can use her to make a profit. So, they're upset about it. So, they create the conflict and they make up lies that aren't true about Paul and Silas. And they get the magistrates all worked up. And next thing you know, they're getting beat up and they're being thrown into maximum security for something they actually didn't do. All of this just reminds us there is a spiritual war going on, so we have to continually engage God in prayer and remember that there is likely to be unexpected conflict. That's just part of the mission.

Verse 25,

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household. (Vs. 25-34)

One quick note at the end of that paragraph, there is a fair, very clear statement that the reason the household was baptized is because the household believed. There are people that use this text to make it say something it doesn't say. The text is very clear. They all believed, which was the basis by which they were baptized. But more to the point, to understand this principle, what if we viewed life through the lens assessing every experience for how God might use that experience to advance the cause of the Gospel? We talked about this, Paul was our model. From Philippians one 12, Paul sitting at that time in a Roman prison, and yet he looks around him and he says, this

is really an awesome opportunity. This place is filled with people that don't know Jesus. He comments specifically on the fact that the elite Roman guards, the Praetorian guards, were actually there as an audience to hear the message of the Gospel, people he would never have had the opportunity to share with apart from being in prison.

This time he's in a prison in Philippi. Now stop and think about this. They had been obedient to the Spirit of God. The spirit led them to Macedonia, specifically to Philippi. They proclaimed the message. They set the captive free. The reward for that is they get beat up by a bunch of thugs and thrown in maximum security. It would be very easy to sit in a prison in chains and a stockade, which would have to be a very unpleasant experience, and to say, God, what is the deal? You said to go here, I've come. I proclaimed the message, I set the captive free and the thanks I get is I wind up in chains in a prison cell. But Paul's perspective is to view life through the lens of, how might God use this experience to advance the cause of the Gospel? So rather than a pity party, he looks around and says, you know, there's this bunch of people in here that probably don't know Jesus. Let's have a worship service! So Paul and Silas have a worship service and the text tells us, the prisoners listened. Then God brings an earthquake and the chains come loose. The gate is opened up and now it's an opportunity for everyone to escape. But no one escapes.

Part of the miracle of this story is the fact that the people that were in prison, they weren't a Sunday school class. These were bad guys, sentenced to maximum security. And now in the moment when the chains are off, the gates are open, it's an opportunity to escape, not one single prisoner escapes. That in itself is miraculous. The jailer comes back, he sees what's happened, he's about to kill himself and Paul stops him and says, hey, wait a minute fella. We're all here. He is so - the jailer- is so shocked, so amazed that he can only come to one conclusion, which leads him to basically grab Paul by the lapels and say, sir, what must I do to be saved? Now that's the line all of us would love to hear.

Wouldn't it be great if Monday morning, wherever we're at, somebody runs up to us, grabs us by the lapels and says, please tell me what must I do to be saved? If only it was always that easy. But don't forget what preceded this moment, which has led to the question. The jailer and his family come to Christ. They are baptized and there is the beginning of a movement that would result in the planting of the church in Philippi.

What would life be like if we always viewed our circumstances - such as they are, the highs and the lows - through the lens of saying, how might God use this to somehow advance the Gospel? I would suggest to you over your lifetime as a Christian, your opportunities to effectively share the message of Jesus will be much more effective in the hard times, in the struggles, in the pains, in the difficult circumstances of life, far more opportunities than in the times when everything seems to be going well. The fact of the matter is that when we're going through struggle and pain and hard times, it's in those moments that the difference Jesus makes becomes obvious to the

people around us. So it's critical that in the most difficult moments of life, we view life through this lens of how might God use this to advance the cause of His Gospel?

Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men." And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. They went out of the prison and entered *the house of Lydia*, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed. (Vs. 35-40)

That last paragraph is my favorite paragraph in this story. I am convinced that Doctor Luke, as he records this part of the story does so with a smile on his face. You have to go back and remember that Paul and Silas, when they were declaring the message of Jesus building the church, stirred up this conflict and the magistrates beat them up, threw them into maximum security. In their mind - we've stopped this thing. And yet as the story unfolds, the policemen come along and say, okay, you're free to go. And Paul says, I don't really want to go. You do realize we're Roman citizens, and this is a Roman colony and under Roman law, you do not have the right to beat us up in the streets like thugs and throw us in prison without a trial. Philippi was a Roman colony. That was a really big deal. It came with all the advantages and perks of being a Roman citizen. Rome prided itself on the fact that they were a civilized people, so they didn't just have thugs in the street, beat people up and throw them in prison. It was required if you were a Roman citizen, that you would be arrested. There would be a trial, there would be witnesses and a verdict would be rendered.

So Paul is saying that you have no right as a Roman colony to act like a bunch of thugs and throw us in prison. As a matter of fact, I think I might go back to Rome and tell them; that's kind of the implication there. So suddenly the magistrates come to prison and one can only imagine what the conversation was, but they bring them out and the text says they were begging them to leave town. So they go from the tough guys throwing them in prison to begging them, please, please do us a favor and leave town.

I think the way the end of this text is written, basically Paul and Silas just kind of mosey down the road to Lydia's house, visit Lydia and the church in Philippi that's now been established. They spent some time together. They encourage one another. They have a little coffee, they eat a couple of donuts and when they're good and ready, they just kind of stroll out of town on their way. I think that's kind of the heartbeat of how this text ends. It's a way of saying that this is the Church of Jesus Christ, and you can't stop this. To the government, to the world religions, to anyone else who would try to stop it, this is the narrative version of what Jesus said in the

Gospels. I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. You can't stop this.

It's very important for us to understand, the church of Jesus Christ is not just another human institution. It's not just a fad. It's not just another organization. It is the church of Jesus Christ, and at the end of the day God wins, and his church will be triumphant. No government, no country, no world religion can stop that. [Applause]

So remember this: **When you as a Christ follower, invest yourself in the life of another, you're investing into something that ultimately will triumph. You're investing in the church that will matter for eternity. God has invited us in to be a part of something that will matter forever.**

Cara: Bryan, the story of the slave girl reminds us that just because some Christians are saying all the right words doesn't mean that they are really helping to advance the Gospel. So what can we do about that?

Bryan: So that's a great question and very sensitive question. So I don't consider it my job to correct everyone and fix everyone. I don't believe God's called me to that. So I'm going to trust that that's pretty much His job. But I think as a local pastor, I need to be thoughtful about who we partner up with. It might be somebody who teaches similar doctrine, but maybe how they go about some other things might negatively compromise our witness. So it's like trying to be thoughtful in terms of ministry partners for the sake of the Gospel. But I also understand, like for me as a pastor, God hasn't called me to correct everyone else. He has called me to shepherd the sheep and to protect them from false teachers.

Bryan: You know, the story in Acts 16 is the slave girl was in their face. So she wasn't off in another town preaching. She was in their face, in their business, and compromising what they were doing. So that's more of an environment in a local church where a false teacher or someone who their behavior is negatively reflecting on the Gospel. It's our job to try to deal with that and to address whatever situations might be there.

Bryan: But the other thing I think about is the best way to expose false teachers is to teach the truth. And I think this is something that we're moving away from in many ways in the American church, is we're trivializing truth. And so, it feels more like a kind of a psychological speech and people don't know what's Bible and what's not Bible. And so, they don't have the ability to discern error. And so there has to be clarity. The Bible says, this is the truth because that's what's going to expose error, whether it's in someone's teaching or just in their behavior.

Cara: How do we know then when to correct that though? I guess what I'm asking is, you see false doctrine going on; believe me, I'm on social media, I probably, I would say almost never, comment on things where it's wrong, because you're not going to change someone. Isn't it unloving though, sometimes to let some of those things go, when we see someone that's just completely off the rails; they claim to be a Christian, but it's just so harsh or it's just inaccurate theology?

Bryan: Yeah, I think that's a great question. The whole world of social media is a bit of a mystery to me. I'm not really on it myself. So I think more in terms of people need to have a local church where they engage and understand what's true, where they can have those dialogues. Once it gets more anonymous out on social media, it just makes people mad. And I don't know that it really solves the problem. People just kind of spar back and forth with one another, and the one who loses probably at the end of that is Jesus, because Christians just seem angry and they're kind of petty. So I guess my advice mostly would be to stay out of it.

Cara: I love how you use the word invest. We touched on this last week that what we do with our money and our time is an investment in the New Heaven and Earth.

Bryan: Yeah. So it does get confusing. So think about it this way. How many people that give to God have a tendency to think what I give to God, I give away, and what I hold onto, I keep. But Biblically, the message would be what I give to God, I actually keep forever. What I keep for myself, I ultimately lose. So it is an investment. It's an investment in that which will matter forever.

Cara: That's a new set of eyes I get to look at that with. So, thanks again, Bryan Clark.