

**Introduction:**

- A. Two years ago this summer was something of a turning point for our church. We'd been struggling to find our way forward in reaching out with the good news of Jesus Christ and we knew God wanted us to be more intentional. So we had two days of worship and fasting, one in June and another at the end of August, and we've continued to pray together every month in *First, Prayer*. God has given us wonderful leadership in our Outreach Team under the leadership of Amit Bhatia. We're more active in simple *prayer, care, share* efforts. We're being challenged to try to up our efforts by just one degree each month. **So what should we expect?**
- B. Turn to Acts 16. The Apostle Paul had just made a big step, crossing for the first time from Asia to Europe. In Philippi he met a merchant in purple cloth whose name was Lydia. Acts 16:14 says, "*The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*" Then she and the members of her household, who also believed, were all baptized. Things were going very well! And that brings us to the part of Acts 16 we're going to look at today. Here is a sample of what Christians in any place or time can expect when we become agents of God's grace to the world around us.

**I. WHEN WE CARRY THE GOSPEL SATAN WILL CHALLENGE US (16:16-24)**

The gospel never runs unopposed. Any Christian, any church, who sets out to spread the good news of Jesus will be opposed.

*Illus.:* The Sunday after our second Day of Worship and Fasting, some folks visited us from another church and heard what we were doing. At the door, this brother commended us for this emphasis but warned me that the enemy will not take

this passively, and we should be prepared. It sobered me. In this story, we see **two of Satan’s classic strategies**.

A. The story of this slave girl in vv.16-18 is very strange. She was doubly a slave—owned by men and possessed by a demonic spirit by which she told the future. The very odd thing about this girl who trailed Paul and his companions was what she shouted (v.17): “*These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.*” A press secretary couldn’t have said it better. Why not put her out in front with a megaphone and some banners? I’ll bet she could gather a crowd for you!

Are you thinking, “*Yeah, but there’s something wrong with this picture*”? Try this: One of Satan’s most insidious methods of attacking the gospel is to agree with it—to preach it himself—to become our gospel ally. But the gospel spoken from a dark heart actually inoculates people against the gospel and blinds them to salvation. Do you think that there were any bystanders who heard that girl yelling out her message, who said, “*Well, if these men can tell me how to be saved, then I’d better talk to them*”? **She may have stirred comments, but I’m certain she had no converts.** Satan wouldn’t let that happen. A heart in bondage to Satan cannot convey the truth of the gospel. As **G. Campbell Morgan** put it, “*God will have no testimony of truth which is not spoken by those who are true, for behind the method there is a motive, and the motive is not that of helpfulness, but of destruction.*” [p.385, *Acts of the Apostles*]

Beware of pastors and cults, politicians, entertainers or social reformers, who will say what we say, that Jesus saves, but whose hearts are not born again. If we warm to them, **the gospel may be shouted, but it won’t be preached**, and people may hear that Jesus saves, but none will be redeemed, because the message comes forth cold.

When we face Satan's challenges, we can resist him.

**V.18...** The spirit left her because demons cannot resist the name of Jesus. As believers, we have that powerful name, and we can and must use it to stop Satan.

- B. When Satan was thwarted in his attempt to co-opt the gospel, he resorted (as he often does) to brute force. If he cannot get us to compromise with him Satan may try to crush us with opposition. Listen to **vv.19-24...** No mention of Satan but he's there, pulling the strings. Lies, like the one the owners told to hide their true motives, are Satan's stock-in-trade. Our Enemy is constantly stirring up worldly powers to crush the agents of Christ's grace, on all sorts of pretexts. *Illus.*: I recall reading how in Turkey two Christians were arrested for "*insulting Turkishness.*" And in Cambodia Christians were banned from door-to-door evangelism because it "*disrupts society.*" In America, sharing the gospel is declared to be judgmental and close-minded; and talk about sin is equated with hate speech.
- SUMMARY:** When we carry the gospel, we will be challenged by Satan and we must resist him. Now another lesson:

What happened to Paul and Silas was terrible. The humiliation as Roman citizens and refined men to be publicly stripped and beaten while crowds gathered to watch and jeer. The severe flogging which left them with breathtaking pain and lacerated, untreated backs. Then thrown into the worst cell of a primitive prison, their feet in stocks so they could not even nurse their wounds. Why would God let that happen?

## **II. WHEN WE CARRY THE GOSPEL WE WILL SOMETIMES**

### **EVANGELIZE FROM DARK AND PAINFUL PLACES (16:25-31)**

- A. When we hurt terribly, the Christian's best remedy is to pray and sing our hearts out to God. I'm not sure that Paul and Silas prayed and sang because they were happy. I think

they prayed and sang because they hurt too much to sleep. **They did it to nurse their own hearts and minds**; to get reoriented back to the Lord. I suspect they sang psalms about God's love and faithfulness, songs about Jesus as Savior and Lord and about the power of God over all other kings. They prayed, I suspect, for the good news of Jesus to spread. They prayed, I assume, for their abusers, for God's glory to shine, for the other prisoners. They prayed that God would help them be strong and be faithful to him.

**Prayer and worship is the refuge of the believer, our balm, our medicine, our pillow, our freedom. We find our way to God, and find God to be enough.** To pray and sing, especially when we can do it with others, is holy therapy for aching hearts and for bruised souls.

- B. Sometimes suffering is gospel work. It is evangelism in dark disguise. The suffering doesn't have to be persecution. It can be sickness or loss or injustice. Often when Christians suffer we wonder what lesson God is trying to teach us but that's not always the point. **Sometimes the whole point of our suffering is who else is listening to us in the darkness.** **V.25:** *"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."* V.28 says that even after an earthquake freed everyone from their chains the other prisoners did not escape. **Mark Buchanan** thought about that and wrote, *"Up to this moment, it's unlikely that a single one of those prisoners had ever seen a man get bludgeoned half to death and come up praising God. They're transfixed by it, wondering what strange power this is that causes men to act at complete odds with common sense."* [CT, 2/08, p.33]
- C. Remember this, when you suffer—no matter what the reason—there are others listening in the darkness. Let them

in on your prayers and songs. You don't have to pretend to be what you're not. No need for plastic smiles or cardboard courage. But tell people what you pray and read from Scripture. Tell them what makes your heart glad even when you hurt. Tell them what you're sure of, what you have in Christ, what no pain or pressure can take from you. Tell them, *"It is well with my soul."* **No preacher ever had a more effective platform than the Christian who sings God's praises from the darkest cell with bleeding wounds.** Because they cannot miss the power of your Lord.

**Cardinal Suhard** said, *"To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist."*

*Illus.:* **Judy DeBaets** went through a long hospitalization a few years ago. She was very ill. After she recovered she sent me a list: *"Some of the ways that God has used my illness for good."* #2 was *"I felt an amazing desire to share my faith and life with everyone. Not ever before feeling that my calling was to evangelism, it became a passion to share my faith and life with others."* #7: *"I was encouraged by a hospital nurse who told me that my inner peace and joy were evident to the hospital staff. I was dumbfounded at that notion, especially at a time when I was very ill and couldn't imagine that I could have any ministry whatsoever."*

**Vv.25-32...** Kent Hughes wrote, *"Their concert so pleased God that he brought down the house!"* [*James*, p.18] This earthquake is interesting. A series of damaging earthquakes would eventually doom Philippi but this earthquake was sent with pinpoint accuracy. **This earthquake was on a mission!** The text says it was violent,

yet the next morning the local magistrates are dealing with routine judicial matters, not disaster response. So it must have been violent just under that jail, and it was a strange shaking that can loose the chains and bars on every prisoner and cell, and yet not bring down the jail itself!

The convulsing earth was an act of our sovereign and merciful God to get the attention of a rock-hard man. When we meet him, the jailer is a pretty pathetic figure, but remember that the evening before he had thrown Paul and Silas in prison—into the worst cell, and fastened their feet in the stocks—without a thought and without mercy. Like most jailers to this day, he was tough as nails and afraid of very little. But God can bring anyone to his knees.

### **III. WHEN WE CARRY THE GOSPEL GOD WILL ARRANGE FOR US TO MEET PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE SAVED (16:30-34)**

When I say ‘we’ I mean us as a church. As I’ve said many times, *the whole church preaches the gospel*. When we are determined to be a holy church and a church that is engaged together in being salt and light in our neighborhoods, jobs and schools, God brings people to us who want to be saved. This is a unique story, but it follows a familiar pattern.

- A. God sets people up to hear the gospel. The jailer might have said, “*What are you going to do to me?*” Or “*How do I get out of this mess?*” But what he said was, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Talk about a pitch down the middle for a Christian. Maybe the jailer just wanted to know what bribe he had to pay to live, but I suspect he had heard the prayers and songs, too, and when Paul answered him, he quickly understood that these men had something he did not have, a freedom the jailer did not enjoy.
- B. You may think you have to do conversational contortions to get someone to let you talk about Christ, but that isn’t the case. You don’t have to be clever. You can be *you*. But be on your toes. Peter tells us, “*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.”* 1 Pet 3:15  
We will have clear opportunities if...

1. **We are on a personal and congregational mission to share Christ whenever we can,** and
  2. **We are praying that God would give us open doors.**
- C. Paul gave him a classic answer in v.31: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved—you and your household.” That summary of the gospel has served the church well for 2000 years now. It captures the simplicity. **“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.”** That is the astonishing miracle of salvation. **“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.”** The door to the gospel opened. V.32 says, *“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.”* In those wee hours Paul and Silas explained who God is, the deadly dilemma of sin, about Jesus, the Son of God, and his death and resurrection for us. And, just as with Lydia, *The Lord opened their hearts to respond to Paul’s message.*
- D. Do not forget how wonderful the gospel is to lost people (vv.33-34). Perhaps they all went through the dark streets to the same river on the outskirts of town where Lydia was baptized. It is clear that each person in the family believed in Christ. No one was saved because the jailer believed. And each one was filled with joy. That’s the part we forget sometimes. That people who come to Christ, people whom Jesus saves, are filled with joy. They haven’t just made a decision. They haven’t just believed something important. They’ve been given new life. **They’ve been saved.**

*Illus.:* Rosa wrote, *“What has it meant for me to be a Christian? This is the best and smartest decision that I ever*

*made. I feel very humble that our loving God had mercy on me, that he has called me to the wonderful light.”*

Illus.: A surgeon in my previous church shared the gospel with an older patient of his. The old man knew almost nothing of the Bible or Christ, but he responded to the good news of Jesus. Even though he was dying, when the doctor came in a few days later, the man said to him, “*I feel like a great load has been lifted off my shoulders.*”

## **Conclusion**

And can it be that I should gain  
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

*Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, should die for me!*

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
I rose, went forth and followed Thee. [Refrain]

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own. [Refrain]