

ACTS 16:16-34

¹⁶ One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."

¹⁸ This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And instantly it left her.

¹⁹ Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. ²⁰ "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. ²¹ "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice."

²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. ²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! ²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he 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, along with everyone in your household." ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

Group Bible Study/Discussion:

1. Read Acts 16:16-34. What questions immediately come to mind? What do you hear God say to you as you read it a few times to yourself?
2. Why was the "fortune-telling spirit" in the woman such a problem for Paul? Why did he react so strongly to the truth it told? Why is this sort of "spiritualism" forbidden for God's people in the Old Testament? What makes it doubly so for Christians? The more literal translation of vs 17 reads, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you **A** way of salvation." How is that different from saying that Paul offers "**THE**" way of salvation?
3. Why do you think Paul waited to cast out the demon? Why didn't he do it immediately & set the woman free from her demonic bondage & human slavery?
4. Do you think Paul & Silas were surprised that they were persecuted? Read & reflect on Jn 15:18-20 & Paul's words in Php 1:28-30. Are those verses applicable to all times or just to the apostles? If you haven't experienced direct persecution for your faith, why do you think that is?
*Francis Chan says, "Something is wrong when our lives make sense to unbelievers."
Could it be that your life makes too much sense?*
5. Paul & Silas were praising God while in prison after being beaten with rods. How do you think they were able to praise God in these circumstances? What else might they have done?
6. Read Acts 5:34-41 for part of a similar account. Why did Peter & the apostles praise God here? Have you ever thought of your own struggles with those who reject faith in Christ like that? Why/not? Read also Mt 5:11-12. How is Jesus offering an encouraging word to you?
7. Why did the jailer think of killing himself? Why did Paul stop him? Read Lk 6:27-36 & compare Jesus' teaching to what happened to Paul & Silas.
8. What happened to the jailer as recorded in these verses? Do you think Paul & Silas' suffering/persecution & subsequent praising of God had anything to do with the salvation of the jailer? How does your reaction to difficult circumstances offer not-yet-believers a glimpse of your faith in Christ?
9. Read Lk 4:18-19. How is this event a further fulfillment of that prophecy? To whom might you be a prophetic fulfillment like this?
10. The good news is not always understood as good news to everyone. To whom might it not be good news? Luther noted that the gospel "*Comforts the afflicted & afflicts the comfortable.*" Does that help you approach an answer?
11. Are there any questions you have about this event in the life of the church?