

STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

The Journeys of Paul

Week 5: Week of February 16, 2020

Sermon Title: *True Freedom*

Text: Acts 16:6-40

(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)

Philippi was the obvious first estimation, as the most important city of the region. Luke does not record that they went immediately into the marketplace and preached there. Rather they spent some days apparently familiarizing themselves with the place, and then went to a place where they thought prayer was made. The uncertainty is resolved by the conversion of Lydia and the baptism of her household. This is the first church that we can clearly identify from Paul's letters whose founding is recorded.

Lydia was substantial business in luxury goods. She also had a house big enough to provide hospitality for the band of four, and servants. She probably was an unmarried daughter or widow. Probably a Gentile. Lydia is the first of the women who are remembered as associates of Paul in his work. She became a leader in the church in Philippi. Her non-appearance in Philippians could have many reasons, of which one was her absence on business. By then other women were prominent in the leadership of the Philippians church.

Lydia's baptism correlates with her heart being opened to pay attention to Paul.

16:16-40 – Success and Tribulation in Philippi

This is one of the most vivid stories. Again, Paul shows a further triumph over magic and demonic activity, with the acquisition of further converts as a direct result, and the respect of Roman authorities. The story is told in great detail and most likely very accurate about the foundation of the Philippians church.

- The slave girl spoke as in a trance. Her utterance is conceivable, since it required only a superficial knowledge of Jewish apologetics or of early Christian preaching. "The Most High God" is an obvious title for Jews. And "the way of salvation" is also common in the early mission.
- That Paul responded with annoyance is authentic. Luke doesn't hide it. This is the first Christian exorcism. Jesus did them in his own authority. They performed them invoking the name. The success would be indicated by the fact that the girl fell silent and ceased to function

as an oracle giver. However she drops from the story and we don't hear anything more about her.

- Now the owners saw their hope of gain had "gone out" with the spirit. More concerned for profit than for their slave they made a citizens' arrest and had Paul and Silas before the magistrates. Slavery was an important economic factor in ancient society. Their charge was not robbery. Rather they used the tactic – an appeal to prejudice against small ethnic minorities commonly known for their peculiar customs.
- It is important to appreciate the fact that in Philippi it was precisely as a Jew that Paul suffered.
- The jailor's actions are highlighted. In an honor /shame society it would be sufficient motive for suicide.
- The two magistrates either have qualms about their too peremptory judgment and try to shuffle the affair under the carpet or are satisfied that a sufficient warning and example have been given; the departure of the main culprits from the city should "close the book". Paul, himself a Roman citizen and therefore exempt from arbitrary \punishment, was able to humble the authorities; they had exceeded their authority and were themselves liable to serious retribution. The public apology was presumably, in Paul's mind, not a matter of rubbing face in the dirt but of establishing the status of the fragile new community, free from the spite of other important citizens they happened to offend.

Discussion Questions

Opening Questions (optional – pick only the ones you want to choose).

- When did you have a decision to make and needed to pray for wisdom? What was the result?
- Have you ever received a vision or dream from God? What was that like?
- Have you ever been the subject of false accusations or been caught up in an unjust situation?

For reflection

1. Consider Paul's experience in verses 9-10. What principles can help us know whether or not we are being guided by the Lord?
2. How does the Lord open the doors for the gospel in the Roman colony of Philippi? How has God opened doors for you? Can you share an example?
3. What strikes you about Lydia? What do we learn about her and her lifestyle? How was she opened to the gospel? Why do you think Luke included her story?
4. In Acts 16:16-40 we see a girl shouting "truth" about Paul and Silas. Yet what was not truth?
5. What does "salvation" mean to you?
6. What spiritual, social and religious attacks do the missionaries meet in Philippi (vs. 16-24)? Can you identify them? Why would they be significant? What attacks do we see today?
7. Set the scene in the prison just before the earthquake. What was happening? Using your imagination and describe what it must have been like? And then do the same after the earthquake.
8. What do you think about the jailer? What were his fears? What was his quest?
9. How did the jailer change because of "the word of the Lord"?
10. How does Paul's insistence on his Roman citizenship help protect the new fellowship in Philippi?
11. How do the happenings in Acts 16:16–34 motivate you to share the gospel where you are?
12. Have you ever been in a situation where you did the right thing even when it would have been easier to do something else? Explain.
13. Paul and Silas were singing hymns in a difficult situation that had lasting impact on the others around them (16:25). How might we do things in our daily living that will impact those around us for the benefit of the Kingdom?
14. Paul and Silas treated the jailer with incredible grace. Describe a time when someone showed you kindness or mercy when you didn't expect it or didn't deserve it. What was that like?
15. How does this story impact your understanding of the character of God?
16. How do Paul and Silas show what freedom is really like? How were they "free" while being in prison?
17. Is someone today feeling like they are "bound up" or "in chains"? How can we as a group be there for you and support you?
18. How does this story impact your understanding of how we are to demonstrate the character of God?