

**THE BIRTH OF A CHURCH**  
**Acts 16:14-21, 40**

**Dr. Howard Batson**  
**First Baptist Church**  
**Amarillo, Texas**  
**June 24, 2018**

Act 16:9

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.

“Help us. Come over here!”

Cries for help can sometimes awaken a preacher from sleep in the middle of the night. And for the apostle Paul, it’s just one of those nights of interrupted sleep.

“Come over here and help us.”

It wasn’t the phone ringing, of course, for Paul, for there were no phones in that day. It wasn’t even the voice of a herald or a messenger. Rather, it was a vision that awakened the apostle Paul in the night.

Macedonia was not where Paul intended to go. Look at the end of Acts 16:6. “They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.” Paul was planning to go to Ephesus, perhaps. The Holy Spirit said, “No, don’t travel to Ephesus.” And in verse 7, he’s trying to go to Bithynia – he changes direction. But, again, “the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.”

Why? Because the Spirit of Jesus knew that Paul was going to get the Macedonian call. “Come over. Come over here, Paul. Help us over here.” So Paul was completely obedient – Paul and his apostolic company, notice in verse 10, “When he had seen the vision, immediately we....” Interestingly enough, this pronoun “we” is now first introduced into the Acts of the Apostles and probably tells us as readers that now the physician Luke is accompanying the apostle Paul and his missionary band as they travel.

When they get to Macedonia, they make their way to Philippi (v. 12), which is a leading city in the district of Macedonia. It was a Roman colony, named after Philip of Macedon who seized the gold mines in the vicinity and fortified the city. Paul had the Holy Spirit as his guide. “Don’t go to Asia. Don’t go to Bithynia. Come over here.”

Paul had the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Jesus, as it was called – guiding him. “Paul, not to Asia. Paul, don’t head to Bithynia. Rather, go to Macedonia.”

And to Macedonia he went.

Can you look back over your life? Can you look back over the moves and the job changes and the steps? Can you look back over it and see where the Holy Spirit was leading and guiding you in the decision making process so that you are where you are today – because you are living in the will of God?

Perhaps many of us have had those life-wrenching decisions where there are two good options, three good opportunities before you. You must choose which door, which direction you are going to take. Listen to the call of the Spirit of God on your life.

When Paul goes to Philippi, he changes his practice. Normally, you remember, in Paul's missionary journeys he begins his missionary work by going to the synagogue, the Jewish place of worship, and proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. Remember, the message was, after all, to the Jew first. But there were very few Jews in Philippi. In fact, there were not even ten Jewish men, which would have sufficed to constitute a synagogue. So, instead of going to the synagogue, Paul went down to the river – an unofficial place outside the city where Jewish women and God-fearing Gentiles would come together for a Jewish service of prayer for the Sabbath Day.

Among the God-fearing women who were worshiping there by the river was a lady by the name of Lydia. She came from Thyatira in the province of Asia, an area that was famed for its skill in the manufacture and use of purple dye. Lydia had come to Philippi perhaps as a trader of purple dye. She was well-to-do. She was an independent woman, a single business woman we suppose.

Notice the end of verse 14

The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

Lydia acknowledged Jesus as Lord. She became Paul's first convert in Europe. She was baptized, and not only was she baptized but – notice – her whole household believed. And she invites them (verse 15) to come to her house and stay. And they did.

A church has to start with people. And Lydia and her family are, we might say, the first members of the First Baptist Church of Philippi. They proclaimed Jesus. They were baptized. And a church is begun in her household.

But other believers are born in Philippi as well. The next one is the most unlikely of all candidates.

She was a slave girl who had become a profit center for her masters. They exploited her demon possession. She is described by Luke as a "pythoness," that is, a person inspired by Apollo, the god particularly associated with the giving of oracles, the god who was worshipped as the Pythian god at the oracular shrine of Delphi. She had involuntary utterances which were regarded as the voice of the god. She was in much demand as people wished to have their fortunes told by the pythoness.

Plutarch called such people ventriloquists. Like a dummy who must say what the master commands, these folks must speak the utterance of the dark spirit within them. Their words are beyond their conscious control.

Day by day, as the missionaries go to the place of prayer, this slave girl follows Paul and the missionary band. She shouts out (verse 17): “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”

Have you ever noticed in scripture that if anybody speaks the truth and if anybody gets it, ironically it’s the demons who speak the truth, it’s the demons who understand the real identity of Jesus? These demons recognize and acknowledge that the apostle Paul and his missionary friends are proclaiming the way of salvation, the way of the Most High God.

Paul had been vexed by her continual clamor. Why, he could hardly preach because of her bold interruptions. Having taken all that he could stand, Paul turned and exorcised the spirit that possessed her, commanding it, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. The words had scarcely left his lips before she was released from her spirit.

Jesus, the name high over all,  
In hell, or earth, or sky:  
Angels and men before it fall,  
And devils fear and fly.

The superior authority of the name of Jesus is recognized by the spirit and he, at Paul’s command, leaves the slave girl in peace.

Her owners were angry, however, because they had used this demonic spirit within her to market her as a fortune teller. With no demonic spirit, there wasn’t going to be any fortunes told. Seeing their profits washing down the drain, the owners had Paul and Silas dragged into the market place before the authorities. “These men,” they say in verse 20, “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.”

They had had it with Paul. They understood Paul and his friends not as respectable Roman citizens (or so they thought), and not even as Greeks (like the population around them), but wandering Jews who engaged in propagating some variety of their own perverse superstition. Therefore, they filed an official complaint.

As a Roman colony, Philippi would be in the hands of two collegiate magistrates – two in charge, serving side by side. There is no investigation into the charge. Rather, they are just beaten with rods. They rip off their robes and beat their backs. Then they are thrown into prison.

Paul and Silas find themselves in the deepest, darkest part of the jail. They even had their feet fastened in the stocks. The jailer in charge was probably a retired soldier. And while training as a Roman soldier had given him many fine qualities, human kindness was not among them.

Paul was brave. Paul did the right thing, even when it meant he was going to receive harm. Paul preaches the gospel whether it suits the whims and wishes of his first century world. Paul was willing to stick out his neck and help the servant girl. Paul was willing to preach the truth no matter what.

You need to realize this morning that **if you speak the truth you should be prepared for whatever comes: either adulation or accusation, loving or loathing, thrones or prisons, recovery or relapse, plaudits or audits.** When Paul recognized that the spirit possessing the young girl was confusing his listeners and drawing attention away from the gospel, Paul banished that spirit using the power of Jesus' name. (**"The Paul Principle," *Homiletics*, 5/24/98**)

Paul did an heroic deed in removing the demon from the young girl. He did an heroic deed in preaching the gospel with a "no matter what" or "come what may" kind of courage.

You can be assured sometimes that no good deed goes unpunished. Do the right thing and sometimes you are going to get a slap on the hand.

**The city of Cincinnati recently took it upon itself to prosecute a Good Samaritan who slipped a quarter into a parking meter as it expired as she passed by. The do-gooder faced a hefty fine plus actual jail time for her good deed. Cincinnati also recently prosecuted a blind man for using his white cane outside the designated crosswalk area.** (**"The Paul Principle," *Homiletics*, 5/24/98**)

Again and again, over and over, it seems that those who stick out their necks get their heads chopped off. Do a good deed and find yourself in big trouble. That's what happened to Paul and Silas.

**Did you hear about the man who stood at the gates of heaven when St. Peter stopped him and said, "Oh, no. You don't get into heaven anymore for just being good. You have to have done something truly great, truly brave. Have you done anything that you can say is really and truly great in your life?"**

**The man thought for a minute and said, "I saw a group of skinhead bikers harassing an old lady, so I kicked over the leader's bike and slapped and spit in his face."**

**"That's great," Peter exclaimed. "When did you do that?"**

**"About three minutes ago," he replied.  
(Dan Shuttters, Ecunet bulletin board Eculaugh, 6/3/95)**

Paul took on the demons themselves, preached the truth, and stood for what was right in helping the demonic girl. But in doing so, he found himself with a bloody back, beaten, and in prison.

Having been beaten with rods and finding themselves in the uncomfortable position of being locked in the stocks, it is quite a surprise that we find them at midnight singing hymns to God. Tertullian said, "The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven."

What were they singing? Psalm 59? Perhaps. “Deliver me from my enemies, O my God, protect me from those who rise up against me, deliver me from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men.”

Maybe Psalm 34. “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to Him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved Him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them.”

One of these, or perhaps another hymn they were singing – there at midnight in the center of the jail, legs in the stocks.

Then (verse 26) “suddenly there was a great earthquake and the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened.” The jailer is awakened from his sleep. He sees the prison doors open, and he concludes the worst. And for a man brought up to a Roman soldier’s ideas of duty and discipline, there was but one course open – he must commit suicide.

He stands here, by the outer door of the prison, to drive his short sword into his throat or his heart. His hand was arrested by a voice from the darkness within the prison: “Do yourself no harm. We’re all here.” There is something uncanny about Paul and Silas. Not only are they there, but they apparently restrained the other prisoners to stay also.

Realizing he is up against something much larger than that which a sword could conquer, the jailer shouts out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Perhaps he had heard the fortune teller’s announcement that these men knew the way of salvation. He was shaken in soul as well as in body. He was convinced that these two men were the ones who could give him release and security. With joy he embraced the message. He believed in Jesus and was saved.

“Believe in Jesus, and you shall be saved.” And immediately (v. 33) it’s odd, but the Philippian jailer washed their wounds and then they washed him through baptism – he and his whole household.

The jailer wasn’t doing anything wrong in taking them home. He was simply responsible for producing them at the right moment. “The chief magistrates want you guys to go on. You can go in peace,” said the jailer.

“Oh, no,” Paul said. They didn’t know it, but Paul was a Roman citizen. “We’re Roman citizens. You can’t just throw us in prison and send us away secretly. They can come out here and make us leave prison if they want us to leave.”

The policemen reported these things to the chief magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard they had treated Romans this way. They knew that Paul and Silas had not had a trial. And they begged them to please just go. “Leave our city. Please just go.”

Paul wanted to set a precedent to help the church and its relationship with the city after he left. He wanted them to know that they, too, had rights.

But notice verse 40.

They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

They go back to Lydia’s house. Notice that Christians are already meeting together there. “They saw the brethren. They encouraged them and they departed.”

This is the story about the birth of a church, a church that started when this well-to-do business woman by the name of Lydia has her heart opened by the Lord – a church that also perhaps includes the demon possessed girl that has a spirit cast from her, a church that includes the household of a husky Roman soldier. All coming together to worship.

They had nothing in common – not one thing. Well, I guess that’s not right. They did have one thing in common. They had believed in Jesus, been saved, and followed in baptism.

Look around this room this morning. What was true of that first church of baptized believers in Philippi is true of the First Baptist Church in Amarillo. We don’t have much in common with each other. We have people at opposite ends of the political spectrum worshipping here this morning. We have people from demographic extremes. We have the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor in our city. We have folks here this morning who are young and some who are old. We have some who are Asian and some who are Caucasian, some who are African-American and some who are from a third world country.

Yes, we – like they – don’t have one thing in common. Well, we do have the one thing. I’ve called Jesus Lord and you have, too. And when two or more people have called Jesus Lord and they gather together, you have the birth of a church.

Perhaps you’re here this morning and like Paul you need be in tune with where the Holy Spirit is leading and guiding you to carry forth the spreading of God’s kingdom.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you are like the Philippian jailer and you ask the question, “What do I have to do to be saved?” You need to believe on Jesus Christ, confess your sins, be born again.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you’re like Lydia – the Lord is opening your heart.

Perhaps you’re here this morning and you are like that demon possessed girl – you need God to come and deliver you from some destructive force in your life.

Who are you in this story? Perhaps you're here and you need to be like Paul, you need to have the courage to share the gospel even when it costs you.

I don't know where you are in this story, but I do know this story is the story of the church.