Text: Acts 16:16-25
Title: Thrown into Jail
Truth: The Christian can endure even painful persecution with prayer and song.
Date/Location: Wednesday night 9/4/2013 and 9/4/2024 at FBC

Introduction

Lydia has just been saved in the Roman colony of Philippi and water baptized. Although she "worshipped God" according to Luke, she did not fully know God or His forgiveness. With the gospel proclaimed to her, the Lord "opened her heart." This phrase indicates to me that she was truly saved at that point, not before. We might say that prior to this she was "close to the kingdom of God" like the scribe in Mark 12:34.

The church started there with her family and probably others came along as well. Paul continues to minister in the city but he hits a big snag when the Devil tries to interrupt the work.

I. What is Said About You Matters, v. 16-24

A. The demon said something **true** about Paul, v. 16-18

1. Paul and Silas were going to prayer, perhaps to the same regular prayer meeting that we read about in 16:13. As they went, they encountered a slave girl who was possessed by a demon.

2. Note first of all that this is a supernatural situation. It is not normal, and it is not good. A girl "met" them, which can also be translated *encountered* and even *opposed*; there is not a friendly sense to the word.

3. This girl was possessed by a spirit of divination. She could tell the future or reveal other normally unknown things because she had contact with the underworld, the occult, the Devil, etc. Her activity was expressly forbidden in the Old Testament law (Leviticus 19:26, Deut. 18:10-12). But it made her masters a lot of money since she could give illicit guidance to people about the future. She was an *oracle*.

   The Greek text says that she has a "spirit of python." This came from the serpent or dragon that guarded the Delphic oracle at the foot of Mt. Parnassus. It was supposedly killed by Apollo. This spirit supposedly lived in someone's belly and allowed them to do ventriloquism. The practitioner had some ecstatic experience when foretelling the future.

4. For many days she repeatedly called out after the men that they were servants of the most high God and were messengers of the way of salvation. What she was saying was true.

5. How could it have annoyed Paul? She could have been ruining their ministry by her noisy interruption; she could have been introducing Paul to people in a way that was inappropriate for the time or place or did not match how Paul introduced Himself to them; she was pointing to them when their focus was on Christ and not themselves.

6. We ought not to think of Paul's annoyance as a petty sinful response to a minor irritation. What was going on here was an all-out spiritual battle. The source of the message, not the message itself, was the problem. No Christian minister wants a demon nearby their ministry! And even when truth is spoken by a demon, it is suspect.

7. At the end of v. 18, Paul commands the demon to come out and leave them alone. He does that in the name of Jesus. It happens immediately. Paul had the designated authority from God to remove demons, a special ability that was available to apostles but not to us today.

8. Note that we are not instructed in any place in the Bible how to diagnose demon possession, nor how or when to cast them out. We should not be talking to demons! We present the gospel to people.

B. The upset men said something **false** about Paul, v. 19-21

1. The masters of this girl (apparently they were in business together) soon became upset when they figured out what had happened. You would think they would be amazed at the power of God and Christ's ministers to do such a thing, but they were only concerned about their livelihood. They should have sought a different way to make a living, but this was probably an easy way to earn money. It seems likely that they were trafficking the girl in all manner of sinful ways.

2. By dragging Paul and Silas off to the authorities, it seems that they hoped to accomplish simply pure revenge. I doubt if they were really interested in justice and the rule of law! They might argue that their hope of profit was gone…from trafficking a girl? And using a demon? Seems like a good opportunity for a righteous judge to bring down the hammer of justice on these unrighteous individuals.

3. The men lied in v. 20-21. Paul and Silas were not exceedingly troubling Philippi! On the human level, they just told a girl to be quiet. They were sharing the gospel quietly with people. The men may have a

slight point regarding Roman law and emperor worship since Paul and Silas would be saying that worship could only go to the Lord and not the emperor. Otherwise, they were not teaching customs that were unlawful. Christians are the most law-abiding people there are.

C. The mob spoke against them, v. 22-24

1. In the end, Paul and Silas were the victims of mob rule. The text says "the multitude rose up together against them." This must have included communication against them—somewhat like the crowds demanding Barabbas from Pilate (Matthew 27:20-22, Mark 15:11-14, Luke 23:18, John 18:40). There was no trial, no defense, no proprieties observed. The magistrates just started beating them with rods. That had to be tremendously painful.

2. Then they threw Paul and Silas into jail. The stocks added to the pain and suffering. The prison guard did not want them escaping, because he would be liable.

3. Notice the words *seized*, *dragged* (v. 19), *tore* off their clothes, *beaten* (v. 22), *threw* them into prison (v. 23), *fastened* (v. 24). This is rough treatment for the servants of God, and picturesque language for Luke to use to describe their suffering.

4. Luke says "we" in verse 16 but does not say that he was placed into custody. We wonder also about young Timothy if he was in jeopardy as well. Somehow he was young enough or on the sidelines so that he did not become entangled in the same net that Paul and Silas did.

II. What You Say Matters Too, v. 25

A. It is left unrecorded whether Paul and Silas gave some defense, or even if they had an opportunity to give a substantive defense. We know from later in Acts that they were not averse to invoking their Roman citizenship, even repeatedly (Acts 16:37, 21:39, 22:25) in order to get a more fair trial. Perhaps they learned in Philippi the importance of invoking that key legal concept!

B. Instead of a defense, Paul and Silas used their voices to sing hymns so the other prisoners could listen, v. 25. We might think these are hymns of joy—and they may have been—but perhaps they were also songs of trust like we read in the Psalms when David was in distress. Regardless, they were directed toward God; they were worship; and they reflected Paul and Silas's focus in life.

C. Next time we will see that Paul said some other things that mattered a great deal to the prison guard who became a follower of Christ.

D. Sometimes I think we overlook this, but Paul and Silas also prayed to God. Evidently their prayers were out loud prayers, but not of the Pharisaical sort for the sake of being recognized, which came under the Lord's withering criticism. These were genuine, humble prayers, not haughty, self-aggrandizing prayers. About what do you think they were praying? Their release? That some in prison would become Christians? That the church would hold up strong despite persecution of its human founders? Perhaps they were praying for their persecutors (Matt. 5:44)!

III. One Message We Can Take from this Narrative

A. This is how it goes sometimes for Christians seeking to do God's will. When someone is bent on getting rid of you, they will do whatever it takes. If they are human traffickers, it is not much more for them to be murderers, it is nothing for them to be liars, to covet your influence over people, to hate God, etc.

B. 2 Timothy 3:12 says that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. True persecution comes in the form of unjust punishment. If we suppose that someone is living godly, then they are not sinning, and they are not breaking any right and good laws. They may be breaking sinful laws. So if they are persecuted through courts or by individuals, it is by definition unjust punishment. This is exactly what Jesus experienced at the hands of the Jewish leaders and Pilate.

C. Sometimes we are called to endure suffering that is completely unjust. Consider Acts 5:40-41 again. If we are called to do this, we should follow the apostolic example of joy in the Lord and patiently enduring, praying, and continuing to live and minister the gospel. We cannot obey men when they command us to go against God.

D. Sometimes we are called to endure suffering through a pathway which was assigned to us by the Lord. God called Paul to Macedonia and Philippi (16:10), even knowing in advance what bad things were going to happen. But He had arranged for a needy sinner to be saved and that was extremely important.

E. Paul and Silas not only endured the suffering, but they give us an example of *how* to do so—praying and singing and ready at any moment to give a gospel witness. They are a great example of prison ministry!

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