
a ***Grace Notes*** course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 306: **Acts 16:25-40**

ACTS, Lesson 306, Acts 16:25-40

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Acts 16:25-40**Acts 16:25**

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

The men were conscious and able to pray, for the grace to withstand their tortures and for the salvation of their captors; they thanked and glorified God, who counted them worthy to suffer for His name's sake.

They "sang a hymn to God", possibly one of David's psalms, or hymns, in which David prayer for deliverance from his enemies.

And they were praying and singing loudly enough so that other prisoners heard them. In that case, they were continuing their witnessing while they were in the midst of the worst suffering!

Acts 16:26

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosed.

It had been an angel of God who opened the prison doors and freed the apostles from prison in Jerusalem (Acts 5:19), and who escorted Peter out of prison (Acts 12:7). In Philippi, though, the supernatural event is an earthquake.

Earthquakes have always been common in Macedonia, but the timing of this one shows that the Lord uses natural means to perform a miracle.

"Anyone that has seen a Turkish prison will not wonder that the doors were thrown open: each door was merely closed by a bar, and the earthquake, as it passed along the ground, forced the door posts apart from each other, so that the bar slipped from its hold, and the door swung open. The prisoners were fastened to the wall or in wood stocks, v. 24; and the chains and

stocks were detached from the wall, which was shaken so that spaces gaped between the stones."¹

All the prisoners' shackles were loosed, which means they all could have escaped.

Acts 16:27,28

And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do yourself no harm: for we are all here.

The earthquake certainly woke up the jailer, no matter how soundly he was asleep. He must have been terrified, and when he saw the wide open doors of the prison, and no prisoners in sight, the jailer was convinced he was doomed, since the death penalty was hanging over his head.

Suicide was common among Romans and was not a crime; it was sometimes looked on as an honorable action. Even at Philippi, just a few decades earlier, Brutus and Cassius, and other conspirators against Julius Caesar, put an end to their own lives.

But then, Paul shouts out from within the prison that none of the prisoners have escaped.

We don't know how many other detainees there were, and we don't know what happened to them later, although no doubt they were re-secured in the prison. But they had at least received some witness for Christ when they heard the disciples praying and singing.

What a statement of the grace of God, for Paul to have such concern for the jailer who had so recently treated him with contempt and violence!

¹ Ramsay, William, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*, pp 220,221.

Acts 16:29

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

The jailer “came trembling”; he was terrified of the earthquake, felt the threat to his own life, and had great emotional sensations of having been on the brink of suicide yet rescued at the last moment. He was amazed that the prisoners were still there; he was confounded by the calmness of Paul and Silas; and he was overwhelmed at the proof of the presence of God.

He called for torches, rushed into the inner prison, and submitted himself to Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:30

And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

The jailer brought Paul and Silas out of the inner prison and at least into the outer court.

Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

The jailer is not asking about his personal safety; the prisoners were all safe and he was no longer in danger on that point. He knew about the preaching that the disciples had done, and he knew that by some power a demon had been cast out of the woman. He knows enough now about the power of God to ask about the gospel of salvation; and that is how the apostle Paul understood the question.

Acts 16:31

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house.

Paul and Silas came straight to the point with the Philippian jailer, telling him what he must do. This is a good lesson for all of us who want to witness for Christ: keep it simple, keep it on the basic doctrines and principles.

They don't tell him to pray, to wait for God to show him the way, or to continue to seek for

salvation. It is not the disciples but only the Lord who can save him. They tell him to place his confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. They assumed that he would understand what it was to believe the gospel, and they advised him to do that.

Often the salvation of one person in a family leads to the salvation of others in the household. God the Father works through families; they are the building blocks of the church.

TOPIC: THE GOSPEL

Acts 16:32

And they spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

The jailer and all his family, and such servants as he might have had, probably lived in apartments on the prison property. Paul and Silas began immediately a teaching ministry to all of these people, to win the others to Christ, and to ground the new believers in the faith.

Notice that the disciples were still bleeding and filthy from the raw treatment that they had received that day, and they had not eaten; yet they carried on preaching in spite of the discomfort they must have felt. The opportunity to witness to a household makes them forget the pain they feel.

Acts 16:33

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

There was a source of water for bathing; maybe it was a well in the prison itself. The jailer helped them wash the blood from their wounds. The same well, or pool, may have provided the water for baptism. It's possible they all made their way to the river for the baptism, but that doesn't seem likely. The ready source of water was more likely near the jailer's home.

In any case, the jailer and his family are recipients of God's grace and they are now

members of the household of God, the body of Christ.

Acts 16:34

And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

The jailer continues to minister to the needs of Paul and Silas. It had likely been many hours since they had eaten.

The rejoicing of the jailer and his family was certainly very great, for many reasons. He was free from danger, the frightening scenes of the night had passed away, the prisoners were safe, and he now was sure that Christ, with His peace and pardon, had come to live with him and his family. So the Ethiopian eunuch, after baptism, had gone on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39).

Acts 16:35,36

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go.

And the keeper of the prison told this to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

Paul and Silas returned to the prison, probably so that they would not cause problems for the jailer. Then they get word from the jailer that the magistrates had decided to release them.

We can only speculate about why the officials decided to release the disciples. Maybe the earthquake and the subsequent events at the prison frightened them. More likely would be that they had become better informed about Paul and Silas, and in fact had discovered the selfish motives of their accusers. Or, it may have come out that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, thus immune to scourging and arbitrary imprisonment. Whatever the case, they were now free to go. However ...

Acts 16:37

But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out secretly? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

Paul has felt the rough edge of injustice administered to him and Silas by the magistrates. Here, he accuses the magistrates and lictors of two violations of the law.

(1) they had beaten those who were uncondemned (Acts 25:16, "...it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges."), and

(2) that had beaten those who were Roman citizens. He wants them to know that they have greatly erred. Paul claims the right of appeal to Roman law, which in the case of Silas and himself was violated.

Roman law, passed from the sixth to the second century B.C., protected Roman citizens from public beatings, imprisonment, and death without trial. For example, the Roman historiographer Livy writes about the application of the Sempronian law, probably passed about 300 B.C.: "Yet the Sempronian law alone seems to have been passed to protect the persons of the citizens, imposing, as it did, a heavy penalty if anyone should scourge or put to death a Roman citizen."

The Valerian Law, passed even earlier, in 508 B.C. also provided freedom from scourging for citizens.

Roman citizenship, then, should have protected Paul and Silas from beating and imprisonment. Exception to Roman law could only be made if a Roman citizen had been duly tried and convicted in a court of law. The magistrates should have conducted a lawful trial instead of yielding to the pressure of the crowd to give Paul and Silas a public beating and confine them in prison.

Why did Paul keep silent when he and Silas were publicly beaten? If they had protested, the magistrates in the frenzy of the moment would not have listened. Paul's silence, whether by circumstance or design, now serves him well to call attention to the gross injustice he and Silas have experienced. If the magistrates are willing publicly to acknowledge their error, they will tolerate Christians and avoid future incidents that relate to the church.²

Paul is now in complete control of the situation. He insists that the Roman offices come personally to the jail, to release two Roman citizens being held illegally. He implies that the magistrates could be in real trouble for their grace miscarriage of justice.

Acts 16:38

And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

And the magistrates were right to be afraid; they faced very severe punishment from the Roman consular authorities for not complying with Roman law. Such was considered an injury inflicted on the very majesty of Rome. They were shaking in their boots!

Acts 16:39

And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

They besought them

That is, they apologized and begged them not make any legal complaint.

They wanted them out of town right away, lest there be any further disturbance or repercussions among the people. But Paul and Silas didn't leave town quite yet ...

² Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953-2001). *Vol. 17: New Testament commentary : Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles.*

Acts 16:40

And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

By now, though it was a short time, Lydia and her family must have been seasoned disciples, having undergone this "baptism by fire" of persecution. As we know a lot about the future of the church at Philippi, there was a solid core here of witnessing believers.

Paul and Silas described all of the things that had happened and provided some more comforting teaching of the grace of God. Then they went on their way to their next destination, Thessalonica.

The church of Philippi was close to Paul's heart. He wrote a special letter to its members in which he urged them to be joyful in the Lord. The word *joy* in its various forms appears sixteen times in this short epistle. It reflects the attitude Paul displayed in the Philippian jail where he and Silas sang hymns in the middle of the night.

Paul had developed a special relationship with the members of that church because they repeatedly provided for his physical needs (Phil. 4:14-18). In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul mentions Epaphroditus (2:25; 4:18) and Euodia and Syntyche (4:2). Yet we know from Acts that two persons from entirely different backgrounds became charter members of the congregation: Lydia the seller of purple from Thyatira (vv. 14-15) and the jailer (v. 33).

It is possible that the slave girl also was part of the church. These converts, having learned the way of salvation, could testify that salvation is a gift of God. With these initial members, God continues to build his church, so that within a short time Paul writes about overseers and deacons in the church of Philippi (Phil. 1:1).³

³ Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953-2001). *Vol. 17: New Testament commentary : Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles.*

The Gospel

The word gospel is translated from the Greek (**euaggelos**), which means good news. Bad news, therefore, such as doctrines pertaining to evil or to personal sins, do not properly belong under the category of the gospel.

The gospel includes all of the doctrines pertaining to salvation, including: redemption, expiation, reconciliation, propitiation, imputation, justification, positional truth, and sanctification. It also includes the doctrines pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ, including: the hypostatic union, impeccability, the deity of Christ, etc.

There are six uses of the term gospel in the New Testament:

- The gospel of Christ; Rom. 1:16,17, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ..." This is an emphasis on the person of the gospel.
- My gospel, Rom. 2:16. This means that the gospel belongs to every believer.
- Our gospel, 2 Cor. 4:3,4. This verse speaks of the believer's possession of the gospel and the importance of communicating it as God gives opportunity in witnessing.
- The gospel of peace, Eph. 6:15. This emphasizes the doctrine of reconciliation in the gospel.
- The everlasting gospel, Rev. 14:6. This emphasizes the proximity of eternity for unbelievers during the tribulation.
- The gospel of the kingdom, Matt. 24:14. This emphasizes the fulfillment of the unconditional covenant to the born again of Israel.

The fundamentals of the gospel are given in 1 Cor. 15:1-4.

- Christ died as a substitute for our sins. His spiritual death means It is finished!
- Christ died physically and was buried
- Christ rose from the dead

The enemy of the gospel is Satan who is the ruler of this world, 2 Cor. 4:3,4.

The believer's attitude toward the gospel is expressed in these verses:

Rom. 1:16, 20;; 1 Cor. 1:17;9:1