

## ~ACTS~

## Lesson 49- God's Saving Power in Philippi

## Acts 16:11-31

We left off our study in the book of Acts in verse 10 of chapter 16 as Paul, Silas and Timothy travel to Troas. And we found that God, in His perfect will according to His perfect timing, led Paul to Troas for one reason: to find brother Luke. God had closed two doors, one into Asia and another into Bithynia, two doors that would eventually be opened for the Gospel to flourish, but that time was not now. God had a specific plan to lead Paul to Troas to find Luke and then, with this company of four: Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, they travel westward into Macedonia. And that is where we will start our study today in verse 11...

**11-12)** <sup>11</sup> Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.

Luke's writings are always so exact, listing the harbors and nautical language of their voyages. Here in verse 11 Luke says **we ran a straight course to Samothrace**. Notice the "we" statement, telling us that Luke is now sailing with Paul to Macedonia. And he says they **ran a straight course**. This is one word in the Greek, εὐθρομέω, this is a nautical term meaning that the wind was behind them, and they didn't have to tack. Because of this they made it to Philippi in just two days. This was the hand of God prospering their journey because later in Acts 20:6, on their 3<sup>rd</sup> journey, they make the same trip back from Philippi and it takes them five days to get to Troas. So here traveling from Troas, the wind is at their back and they come **to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis**. Neapolis is the harbor for Philippi which is about 10 miles from the main city of Philippi.

Notice how Luke describes the city of Philippi. As **the foremost city**... it was a prominent city of Macedonia, and he makes the special mention that it was a colony of Rome. The fact that Philippi was a colony of Rome is significant because later in this chapter, after Paul is beaten and arrested in Philippi, he makes it known that he is a Roman citizen. Roman colonies were like a mini transplant of Rome itself throughout the Roman Empire. Not all cities of the Roman Empire were Roman colonies. It was a special privilege that a city would have this honor.

Philippi gained its name by Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great in 358bc. It was brought under Roman control in 168bc. Then in 42bc after the battle of Philippi, it was made a Roman colony by Emperor Augustus, who was Octavius at that time, and he and Mark Antony won the battle against the assassins of Julius Caesar. The people of Philippi assisted them in winning this battle, therefore when Octavius became Emperor, he granted Philippi with this Roman status. Then in 31bc, Augustus raised the standing of Philippi to the highest level by granting it what is called *jus Italicum*, giving Philippi the privilege of standing on the same level as the colonies of Italy.

Because of this special status, the inhabitants of Philippi were granted citizens of Rome, which we will see play a big part in the narrative in this chapter because citizens of Rome were exempt from scourging, flogging, and arrest, unless first convicted by a Roman court. Which we will see the magistrates of Philippi don't even consider this with Paul and Silas. Philippian citizens seemed to boast in this privilege of being a Roman citizen because they use this to make a contrast between Romans and Jews in **Acts 16:20-21**. Also, Paul alludes to this special status when he writes back to the church in Philippi, making a contrast telling the Christians of Philippi that we are "citizens of heaven," Phil 3:20. No longer are you citizens of Rome, but we as Christians are born from above and we are citizens of heaven.

Luke ends verse 12 by saying **we were staying in that city for some days**. This "some days" is probably a couple of months. By now it's about 52ad. Paul and Silas left Antioch in the summer of 51ad, and probably

spent the rest of that year traveling through Syria, Cilicia, and the region of Galatia strengthening the churches in the faith. And now they spend a couple of months in Philippi staying at a lady's house named Lydia who we meet in the next verse...

**13) And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.**

This is probably the first Sabbath day since they arrived in Philippi. We can infer this because Luke uses the connecting particle, τε, in each of these three verses that's not really translated but it gives us the sense of a rapid succession. And this word, being used three times in three verses, links all the events together in one rapid sequence: they made a straight course to Samothrace; then came to Neapolis; then Philippi, then the Sabbath day. It's all in rapid succession within that same week.

And as was Paul's custom, he went to the Jew first then the Greek, but there doesn't seem to be a synagogue in Philippi, so they go **out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made**. Philippi wasn't a very large city. Its population was probably between 2,000-5,000 people. But even then, it is odd that this city wouldn't have a Jewish synagogue. But I believe there is good reason why there isn't one and why they have to meet outside the city. In Acts 18:2, Luke tells us that Aquilla and Priscilla left Italy and came to Corinth because "*Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome.*" This happened in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Claudius reign in 49ad\*. And because Philippi was a *jus Italicum* colony, it is very likely that this same edict went through Philippi and the Jews were expelled as well.

**14) Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.**

Lydia was a Jewish proselyte because Luke says she revered God, σεβομένη τὸν Θεόν. She was a successful businesswoman from Thyatira, a city in Asia where Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go. Thyatira was well known for their purple cloth made from a shellfish prominent in the waters of Thyatira. She would collect this purple dye and make clothes to sell to the wealthy people of Philippi. Jesus even mentions the rich wearing purple clothing in Luke 16:19. And we know she was successful because she has her own house big enough to house Paul and his company for a couple of months, Acts 16:40.

But on the Sabbath, Lydia, a faithful Jewish proselyte, is praying by the riverside, a woman who fears God. One who has a humble heart and open ears, and Paul come and sits next to her and starts preaching the Gospel. Luke says, **the Lord opened her heart**. Did God just randomly open her heart? No, there was something that happened beforehand to make this possible... Luke says just before this that **Lydia heard us**. This was the prerequisite to the Lord opening her heart. He didn't just open her heart randomly without her will being involved. He opened her heart because she had ears to hear. This can be seen more clearly in the Greek. Here in our English translation, the phrase "Lydia heard us," is placed at the beginning of the verse, but notice how it reads in the Greek,

καί τις γυνή ὀνόματι Λυδία, πορφυρόπωλις πόλεως Θυατείρων,  
A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira,  
σεβομένη τὸν Θεόν, ἤκουεν· ἧς ὁ Κύριος διήνοιξε τὴν καρδίαν.  
one who reverences God, **was hearing**. Of whom, the Lord thoroughly opened the heart.

προσέχειν τοῖς λαλουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου.  
to grasp hold of the things spoken by Paul

\* Paulus Orosius, Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII, Book VII, chapter 6

Lydia had expectant ears and received the Word, then the Word awakened her soul and she grasped hold of the things spoken by Paul. This is Romans 10:17- *Faith comes out from hearing and hearing comes through the Word of God.* The Word awakens the heart through expectant ears. So Lydia hears the Word of God and believes, as well as her family who seems to be there as well.

**15) And when she and her household were baptized,** (probably in the river where they were praying) **she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us.**

Lydia becomes the first recorded convert in Macedonia and the first case of Christian hospitality. This word persuaded is *παραβιάζομαι*, meaning “to urge strongly.” This word is unique to Luke and only used twice in the Bible: here in Acts 16:15 and on the road to Emmaus when the two disciples urged Jesus to come abide in their house, Luke 24:29.

God has been directing the Apostle's steps on this 2<sup>nd</sup> journey; closing certain doors and opening others. Paul's faithful companions, both Timothy and Luke, have joined with him. They crossed over to Macedonia according to the vision and now they are starting to see the fruit of their journey. But as we said last week, many times when God opens a door to the Gospel, the open door doesn't always lead to safety, but it will lead to His perfect will with unending joy and glory. So now after Lydia and her family are saved and they have a place to stay, the enemy begins to attack them.

**16-18) <sup>16</sup> Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup> And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour.**

For days, the enemy begins taunting the Apostle Paul. Using a demon possessed girl to mockingly cry out “**These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.**” This is a true statement, but the enemy will never speak the Truth without trying to pervert it in some way, so just like Jesus, Paul rebukes this spirit of divination. So that takes care of this annoying demon following them, but it leads to another problem, because now the pagans who were making money from this girl have lost their source of income.

**19) But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.**

When the demon was cast out, so also went the master's profit. You don't see this in the English, but Luke uses the same exact word three times in verses 18 and 19 to make this connection. Verse 18- **“I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out,** *ἐξέρχομαι*” **And he came out,** *ἐξέρχομαι*, **that very hour.** Verse 19- **their hope of profit was gone,** *ἐξέρχομαι*, had gone out. When the demon went out, the profit also went out.

Up to this point, the people of Philippi had tolerated these Jews in their Roman city, but now that their dealings have effected their pocketbook, they become violent and **they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.** We will see the same type of thing happen in Ephesus with Demetrius the silversmith when preaching the Gospel stops people from buying statues of Diana and the pagans become violent and want to kill Paul, Acts 19:23-41. The same thing happened to Jesus when He cast the legion of demons out of the madman of Gadara and into the pigs, and the pigs ran into the sea and drowned. This deeply affected the swine herder's income and they forced Jesus out of their city, Luke 8:26-37.

So here in Philippi, they first grabbed ahold of Paul and Silas and took them to the rulers in the marketplace, but then these rulers quickly escalate them up to the magistrates.

**20-21)** <sup>20</sup> And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; <sup>21</sup> and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.”

After Claudius’ decree to expel the Jews from Rome, the Jews were also expelled from this Roman colony of Philippi, and now, from the Roman perspective, these Jewish men are causing trouble and **they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe**. Notice the distinction they make between Romans and Jews. Their Roman pride and allegiance to Caesar has blinded them from the Truth. And they would rather call Caesar lord instead of Jesus who is the Lord of all. But for a Romans, to call Jesus Lord would be treason, so they say **it is not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe what they teach**. So the magistrates take immediate action...

**22)** Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.

Because of the fury of the crowd, the magistrates jump to conclusions and they strip Paul and Silas of their clothes and begin beating them. It was the magistrates responsibility to determine if they were guilty or not, but because of the haste, they don’t hold a formal Roman trial and instead they begin beating Paul and Silas. Of which we will find that this was unlawful because Paul and Silas were both Roman citizens and they had the right to a Roman trial. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:25 that he had been beaten with rods three times. This was one of the three times he speaks of. The Jews always scourged with 40 minus 1 lashes, but the pagans had no such restraint. They would beat the prisoners as long as they wanted until the crowd was pleased with them. In this case, they beat long and hard because the crowd and the magistrates were violently mad. This violence is also displayed when they are thrown into the inner prison where prisoners would await their execution. In **1 Thessalonians 2:2** Paul writes of this spiteful treatment.

**23-24)** <sup>23</sup> And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup> Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

There were three parts to a Roman prison: 1) the outer part with light and fresh air; 2) Further within the prison in a cell behind bars with locks; 3) the inner prison, a dungeon, specifically held for prisoners condemned to die. Here in this dungeon, Paul and Silas are bloody, bruised, locked in stocks, and in excruciating pain, but yet this dungeon will become their next mission field for the Gospel. So Paul and Silas have a choice... are they going to get mad and start blaming God for calling them to Macedonia or will they praise and glory in their tribulations?

**25)** But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Can you imagine this? Paul and Silas begin shining as Light in the midst of the darkness of that dungeon. They are singing and giving glory to God, rejoicing in the tribulations. Paul hadn’t written the book of Romans yet, but this is Paul acting out Romans 5:3-4- <sup>3</sup> *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;* <sup>4</sup> *and perseverance, character; and character, hope.* And Romans 8:18- *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* Or 2 Corinthians 4:17- *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* This is what Paul and Silas are doing in this dungeon, they are rejoicing in the midst of persecution, giving glory to God. We don’t know exactly what they were singing, but **Psalms 63:1-8** certainly shows what was in their heart. And then notice the results...

**26)** 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 chains were loosed.

Remember the previous verse just said that the prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas singing and praising God. Now God bears witness to these prayers and sends His angels into that dungeon. The power of God came upon that prison and all the doors were thrown opened and everyone's chains were loosed. But I think all the prisoners are stunned by God's glory because look at verse 27...

**27-28)** <sup>27</sup> And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. <sup>28</sup> But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

That's an amazing miracle in itself, the fact that all the doors are opened, and everyone's chains are loosed, but everyone stayed put where they were. This was the miracle that brought the Philippian jailer to Salvation. Because when the jailer saw all the doors opened, he assumed everyone escaped and was about to kill himself. Why? Because it was Roman law that the sentence of any escaped prisoner would be transferred onto the jail keeper, and he would have to bear the escapee's sentence. In the case of the inner prison, these guys had the sentence of death, therefore any prisoner that escaped with a death sentence, that death sentence would be placed on the jail keeper instead. And there is a very interesting correlation with this and what Jesus did for us on the cross. When a prisoner would serve his sentence in prison, he would receive a certificate for his release, and written at the bottom of that certificate was the word, "Tetelestai," paid in full. This is the same word Jesus cried out on the cross, Tetelestai, It is finished, paid in full, John 19:30. Jesus Christ paid our debt of sin, our sentence of death by dying on the cross in our place so that we could be set free, **Col 2:14**. Only Jesus Christ can pay our sentence of death. So Paul yells out saying "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Notice what the Philippian jailer does...

**29-30)** <sup>29</sup> Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

The Philippian jailor saw a miracle of God. And he knew that the God of Paul and Silas, the God that they had been singing to had just shown His power and he asks, **what must I do to be saved?** For him to ask this means Paul and Silas must have preached to him beforehand, and then when God showed up in power he could only fall down on his knees. And Paul and Silas show him the way to the True Lord Jesus Christ with the simple Truth of the Gospel...

**31)** So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

The way to eternal life is to simply believe. Put your total trust and reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Not by works, not by baptism, not by following the Law of Moses, but simply by grace through faith, by putting your entire trust upon Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation.