

Acts 16 • Doors both Opened and Closed

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The man that we know as the apostle Paul was originally known by his Hebrew name, Saul of Tarsus. He was a Jewish Pharisee and he was a man who passionately believed that these followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who believed that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, he believed them to be a heretical and a dangerous group of people that needed to be eliminated. And so he did whatever he could. In fact, everything he could.

And he wanted to see that they would be arrested or killed. And he was known, this Saul of Tarsus, far and wide as a man who was the persecutor of those that would later be known as Christians.

Until one day, when Saul was on his way to Damascus, he was met by Jesus Himself who appeared to him in glory, knocked him to the ground, blinded his eyes, and revealed Himself in such a way that Saul of Tarsus became later known by his Greek name, Paul.

And he was radically saved and became the spokesman for this Christian faith, the reality of what it is to believe in Jesus Christ. And he became the apostle to the Gentiles. And during his ministry on this earth, the apostle Paul went on 3 missionary journeys that are listed for us and chronicled for us here in the Book of Acts written by Luke.

The first journey, as we read, was made with Barnabas. But when those two men got together to consider going on a second trip to go and visit the churches they had started, they couldn't agree on whether or not to take John Mark with them, since John Mark had abandoned them on their first time out. And so Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to the island of Cyprus to continue the work there.

Well, Paul chose a man by the name of Silas. Interestingly enough, Luke calls him Silas, but when you read the writings of Paul and Peter, they refer to him as Silvanus. But that was a very common thing back in those days to have multiple pronunciations for a person's name. I like Silas better, frankly.

Chapter 15, you'll remember, ended by telling us that Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

And then as we pick up chapter 16, verse 1, it says, "Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. (or if you will, a Gentile)"² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. (ESV)

We're going to get further, but let's stop there for now and pray. Father, open our hearts. We pray for Your Holy Spirit to enlighten us, to reveal to us from what these words say to what You would have us to live out and walk out in our faith in Jesus Christ.

We just pray that You would enlarge our hearts, that You would give us ears to hear, hearts to receive. We look to You, Lord, and no other. In Jesus precious name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. All right.

Well, as we look at what is happening here in these first 5 verses of chapter 16, we see that Paul and Silas came in this second journey of Paul's to the cities of Lystra and Derbe. And just to remind you where these are located, I'll put a, we'll put a map up on the screen for you.



So you can see Jerusalem way down in the right hand corner, so that gives you a sense of where Israel is located north of that. You see Antioch, which is where the church was now being centralized at this particular time. And north of that is what is modern day Turkey. In fact, even all the way to the left there as well, that entire land mass, it was called Asia Minor back in those days. It's modern day Turkey, but you can see the little red box there that I put on the screen circling the cities of Lystra and Derby. And this is where they decided to really head first and foremost on this second missionary journey.

Now I want to remind you something about Lystra. This is where Paul got into some trouble and they actually grabbed him, dragged him out of the city, stoned him and left him for dead. Yeah, that was at Lystra.

You remember what happened? It says the disciples gathered around him and prayed for him. (Acts 14:20) I believe that was a miraculous healing, and he got up and went back into the city for a short time, and then left and went on. But now here he is back in this area where he has been treated so shamefully, and so violently, and yet he is back there because he wants to know how the believers are getting along.

And Luke tells us here in verse 1 that there was a disciple, a follower of Jesus there in Lystra by the name of Timothy, and he was a young man. We're not

exactly sure how young. Some people think as young as 15. I'm not sure about that but it's possible.

But we're told about him a couple of interesting things. The first thing we're told is that he was of mixed parentage. His mother was Jewish and his father was a Gentile. And there is reason to believe that Timothy came to faith in Jesus, during Paul's first trip to that city, when he came through with Barnabas. The reason we believe that is because of the way Paul refers to Timothy. You'll notice here, I'll put a couple of these up on the screen.

First from his letter to Timothy Paul writes this,

1 Timothy 1:2 (ESV)

To Timothy, my true child in the faith...

To Timothy, my true child in the faith...

And that would suggest that he came to the Lord through Paul's ministry. And

1 Timothy 1:2 (ESV)

To Timothy, my true child in the faith...

1 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)

...Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord...

...Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord...

Now that's not a biological statement. He's talking about his being a parent spiritually to Timothy, but there was another thing that we're told about Timothy that's also very important to see, and that's in verse 2 if you look with me in your Bible.

It says, “*He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.*” And what that means is that Timothy had a very good, strong, reputation, which is amazing for a man of relative young age.

We're also told in verse 3 that Paul took Timothy and had him circumcised, and then we're given the reason for that at the end of verse 3. And the reason is, because of the Jews who lived in that region, because they knew his father was a Gentile. Let me explain.

When a child was born of mixed parentage, Jew and Gentile, the Jews who would observe that offspring would assume that child was Jewish. Okay. Not a Gentile. They would say that child is Jewish. Now, if it's a male child, they would have every expectation that child would be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. And if he wasn't circumcised, that would be a problem for the Jews. You with me?

Now, Paul knew that the Jews in that region knew Timothy and knew that his father was a Gentile. But for some reason or another, Timothy had never been circumcised. And that was either because his father objected, or his mother just didn't press it, or whatever the thing was, it just had not happened. So Paul had him circumcised for one reason, and one reason only, and that was to eliminate any objections that Jews might have. In other words, he did to take away any problems or barriers of the Jews accepting Timothy and his testimony.

Now, this is a very important thing to remember. Don't be confused by the fact that Paul had Timothy's circumcised. This doesn't mean that circumcision was required in any way. In fact, Paul's statements about circumcision are known far and wide. When he wrote to the Galatians about circumcision, Here's what he said. Up on the screen, from Galatians chapter 5. He said,

Galatians 5:6 (ESV)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything...

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything...

In other words, as far as your faith in Jesus Christ goes, circumcision doesn't matter because it was a matter of faith Jewishness. You have to understand that the Law of Moses, you guys, and circumcision was part of the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was between Israel and God. All right. It was between Israel and God. It is not between Christians and God.

That's not to say the law isn't important, but the law is not part of our covenant with Him. It was part of their covenant. We're under a different covenant. Their covenant said, here's the law, obey it, and this is what I'll do. I'll bless you in the land. That was God's agreement with Israel.

God never made that agreement with Christians. He never said to you and me, here's My law, obey it, and this is what I'll do. He never said that. Our covenant is, believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Right? That's our covenant.

That's the terms of our covenant. Put your faith in Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved. Right?

As far as circumcision goes, which was a covenant sign between God and Israel, Paul says there in Galatians, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter as far as your relationship with God goes. All right.

The last thing we saw in verse 4, again, there in your Bible is that, "*As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.*" This is referring back to the last chapter, chapter 15. And you remember what that decision was all about? It was about circumcision.

Do you remember what happened? There were people, Jews, coming up to Antioch telling the Christians, hey, you guys got to be circumcised or you can't be saved. And Paul and Barnabas said, that's not true. That's wrong.

Well, they had a little bit of a dispute about that so they said, listen, we're going to go back to Jerusalem and we're going to consult with the elders and apostles there in Jerusalem had to get a final word on this decision. And that final word was, no, circumcision is not required to be saved by Jesus Christ.

Paul and Silas are now taking that decision, if you will, and they're giving it to all of the churches where they are stopping in and checking on these people and so forth.

And it says, "*...the churches were strengthened in (verse 5) the faith, and... increased in numbers...*" Verse 6 goes on, this is very interesting. It says, "*And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.*" Okay, this is really interesting.

You'll notice that Luke doesn't explain, as he's writing this for us, why or how the Holy Spirit determined that they were to not go into Asia. And Asia minor is really the name for that whole area, but this would include cities like Ephesus.

God is telling Paul and Silas, don't go there, don't go to Ephesus. Now, they're going to go to Ephesus eventually, not only are they going to go there, but Paul's going to stay there for two and a half years. He stayed in Ephesus longer than any other city, but for right now, God is saying to Paul and Silas, don't go. I don't want you to go there.

Somehow in the wisdom of God's timing, it just wasn't right for them to go to that area at that particular point. But here is the Lord telling them don't go.

Now we're going to talk about this here, but in case you need another refresher here about perhaps where we are, I'm going to put another map up on the screen so you can see as we're moving farther west. I want you to just be watching the map as I read these next few verses. Okay.



Verse 7, *“And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.”* Again, we're not told how He communicated that, He just said, don't go there.

“⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia (that's modern day Greece) was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.””

All right, stop there for a minute. We need, we've got to talk about this and what's going on here.

What Paul and Silas have been doing for a period of time is they've been wandering around Asia Minor and everywhere they've been going, the Lord has been saying, no, don't go there. And you'll notice here how they are receiving this direction.

Look at verse 6. It says they were forbidden. By who? The Holy Spirit. And then in verse 7, you'll notice Luke tells us, "*the Spirit of Jesus... (wouldn't) allow them*" to enter Bithynia. And then in verse 10, after Paul has this vision and he shares it with everybody else, it says they concluded that God had called them to cross over into Macedonia.

Did you notice that all 3 persons of the Trinity are involved there in the direction process of Paul and Silas? The Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God, the Father are all involved in directing and guiding Paul and Silas.

But here's the point about this. You'll notice that this process of being led by the Lord is not always an easy process. I don't know, maybe it is for you. Maybe you never have any trouble being led by the Lord. I'll just admit right now that I do struggle from time to time being led by the Lord and sometimes I'm not sure how I'm really being led.

And that's what's going on here because Paul, he says, we're going to head up to here toward Mysia and then the Holy Spirit goes, no don't do that. And they decide that, okay, well, let's go over here toward Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus says, no, don't go there either.

What's going on here? Didn't the Lord call Paul to go out and do this work of sharing the gospel and didn't He send them out? Didn't we hear the Holy Spirit speak in an earlier chapter where God said, set apart for me, Paul and Barnabas for the work to which I have called them and they laid hands on them and sent them out? (Acts 13:2-3)

Wasn't that God's will? Why are they running into all these closed doors? Why are they running into all these barriers? And why in the world is God the one who's causing the barriers? Why is God the one who sent them out on the one hand and then on the other hand keeps them from going where they want to go?

Now, these are challenging questions, but what we learned from this passage is that sometimes God leads us by closing doors. How's that one grab you? Probably not very well. Most of us don't like closed doors. We don't like to be stopped, especially when we think we should be moving. But there are times when God blocks our path.

And I don't know if that messes with your theology or not, but you see it right here in Acts chapter 16. Sometimes God is the one who blocks your path and anybody who's ever been blocked, you know that it could be a very frustrating ordeal.

Well, here's the tough question. How did Paul and his companions know that it was God blocking their path and not the enemy? Because you see, you would naturally assume it's the enemy, wouldn't you? And I've noticed in my own life and when I hear other people talking about the blockades they've run into, that their natural assumption is that it's the enemy. They don't really know for sure. They think they know for sure, but they don't. They're assuming. And it's probably right that we would assume. It's, well, is this what God told me to do? And now I ran into a wall. Well, obviously it's the enemy, right?

Well, not in Paul's case. First, we have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus saying to them, don't go here. Don't go there. Well, how did he know? How can we know when it is God or when it's the enemy?

Well, you ready? The fact is sometimes we can't. Not without praying, not without seeking God's face. It is almost impossible to know immediately what's going on before you've prayed about things. Because you know what? Although we see God blocking Paul's path here in Acts chapter 16, that wasn't always the case, sometimes it was the enemy. Look what Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica up on the screen. He says,

1 Thessalonians 2:18 (ESV)

...we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.

...we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, (totally wanted to come) again and again—but (look at this) Satan hindered us.

Okay, this time it's not God. It's Satan. How do you know? Well, you don't until you've prayed sought the Lord and walked in the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

I really believe that wisdom and humility would suggest that when you run into a barrier in your path, the best thing for you to do is not to assume, but to seek the Lord and ask Him to show you. Just exactly who's slowing you down here, because it's very important that the answer to that question.

And the reason I say that is because if it's the enemy who has put up a barrier in your path, well, then you've got some praying to do, and particularly some spiritual warfare, right? You got some battle to get into and sometimes we have

to do that. Sometimes we face battles in walking in obedience to the Lord when the enemy puts up a resistance.

But if it's God who has, is the One who has put up a barrier in your path, well, then spiritual warfare isn't what you need, what you need is submission. And that can be even tougher because that means you need to just chill, and back off. And then do that one, oh, that one word we hate more than anything else. Wait. Wait. Just wait.

Sometimes God closes the door right in your path and He says, child, I want you to wait. And that can be the toughest thing to do, especially when we've got a head of steam going in whatever direction we are going.

But here's the bottom line in all this. We Christians, we have to admit, I think it's time that we admit that we need to grow up in our ability to discern spiritual directions from the Lord, or spiritual directions period. We need to grow in our ability to discern whether or not it is the enemy or it is the Lord who is directing our path.

Rather than assuming, rather than getting frustrated, and I have to wonder how many Christians have assumed that it was the enemy stopping them in their tracks when it was, in fact, the Lord doing it. And so here they are fighting, railing against the enemy and he's sitting back there going, I didn't do that. This is God. And yet we're fighting against the enemy. Oh, the devil, he's slowing me down.

I think that's God doing that. Yeah. See, well, sometimes that's the case, but you know what? We need to grow in our ability to discern that. And that means we need to learn to get quiet. We need to learn to listen.

We need to get rid of that whole mentality that is so American in us that wants to run through the drive up window of discernment and just know instantly in 2 minutes or less, what's going on here. And rather than having that sort of an attitude, be willing to say, Lord, I'm going to wait on You to find out what's really happening here. And I'm going to trust that You're going to show me. Well, those are important things, okay.

Well, something else I want to bring out here. I don't know if you noticed something very significant happened between verses 8 and 10, but I want to show you.

Verse 8. Look with me again in your Bible. It says, “*So, passing by Mysia, they (note that) went down to Troas.*” Who’s they? Paul, Silas, Timothy. That’s they, right? But then in verse 10, did you notice it says, “*And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called (look at us) us to preach the gospel to them.*”

So what happened between verses 8 and 10? Luke joined them in Macedonia. He’s the one writing this account and this begins what we call, the we passages, where Luke is traveling with Paul and Silas and Timothy. And that’s why you see the change there.

Now verse 11, it says, “*So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace,...*” And I know some of you probably don’t know where Samothrace is. Here’s what’s interesting about this before I put my map up. You know I’ve been putting maps up here in the Book of Acts that are recreations, re-drawings of the region with the biblical names in them, and that’s one of the reasons we use those kind of maps.

But you can go on Google maps and you can see all these same landmasses and many of these places still have the same names they did 2,000 years ago. Let me, here’s an example. This is Google Maps. I just popped this up last night and I circled Troas. That’s where they were when Paul had the vision of the man from Macedonia saying, come over and help us.



It says they immediately sailed to Samothrace. Well, we don’t know where Samothrace is. Well, it’s actually that little island out there in the Mediterranean. They stopped off on this little island, which by the way, still has a very similar name to Samothrace and then they went on after that.

It says here at the end of verse 11, *“and the following day to Neapolis,”* And the reason that is significant and it's not showing it on the map, it goes off the screen there on the left. But the reason it's significant you guys that they went from Asia Minor westward, is because this is the very first time the Gospel has made it to the continent of Europe, the very first time.

This Macedonian call that we actually refer to it as, is extremely significant because the Gospel moved for the first time from the region that we call Asia, which is now modern day Turkey, into Europe, and starting there in what is now Greece.

It says here in verse 12, *“and from there to Philippi, (which of course is where the Philippian church is going to be planted) which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. (and it says) We remained in this city some days.”*

Now we come to verse 13 which tells us there weren't very many Jews when they crossed over into Europe. And we know that because verse 13 says, *“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.”*

Here's why we know there weren't many Jews living there in Greece. It's because if there had been enough Jews, they would have had a synagogue and Paul would have gone there on the Sabbath. That was his usual way of doing things, but they didn't even have enough Jews to qualify for a synagogue. And so on the Sabbath day, they just said, hey, let's just go hang out at the river's edge and we'll find a spot where we can just pray and be together and seek the Lord. And while they were there, they saw some women that were down by the riverside and they struck up a conversation with them and began to chat with them. And of course that means they're going to share the Gospel.

Verse 14 says, *“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, (which is very short distance from Philippi, she, it says she was) a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.”*

Now, Luke tells us two important things about Lydia. First, that she was a seller of purple goods. That means that she dyed fabric into the color purple, which was a very expensive proposition back in those days. And it was very expensive to purchase as well, which tells us Lydia was probably a woman of some financial means. All right.

Secondly, Luke tells us she was a worshiper of God, and that is really just his way of saying she believed in one God who created heaven and earth. But that's probably as far as her understanding about God went. She just believed that there was a God who was the creator of all things. All right, so it's a very rudimentary understanding.

And it tells us here in the end of verse 14 that, *“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”* Which obviously he's sharing the Gospel of Jesus. ¹⁵ *And after she was baptized, (which tells us she accepted his message and accepted Jesus as her Savior) and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.”*

Lydia now has opened her home to Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy, which again, communicates to us, she was a woman of some means to take in these 4 men, and feed them, and care for them during this time. All right.

Verse 16, *“As we were going to the place of prayer, (and I assume this is probably a week or so later, maybe more. He says) we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain (in another words, they made a lot of money) by fortune-telling.”* And what this means is, they were exploiting a young girl who was possessed by a demonic spirit because through that spirit she was able to tell fortunes, and so they got money. They hired her out, if you will and so forth.

It says in verse 17 that, *“She followed Paul and us, (you’ll notice that Luke is still with them) crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”* ¹⁸ *And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, (I love that) turned and said to the spirit, (notice that, not to the girl, but to the spirit) “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.*

¹⁹ *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain (in other words, their hope of making money) was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.* ²⁰ *And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city.* ²¹ *They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.””*

What they should have just said is, now we were out of money because of these guys, that's the truth, but they're making up something against them.

“²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them (in other words, they stripped them) and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison (which will be more secure) and (he) fastened their feet in the stocks.”

This guy is doing everything he can possible to make sure these guys don't escape. Right?

“²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, (I want to just let that sink in for just a minute, okay, good) and the prisoners were listening to them, 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 bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.”

Now, what that tells you right there is that the jailer believed that these men were marked for execution because under Roman law, if you were a guard or a jailer, and you were holding someone marked for execution, and they escaped, you would suffer their fate. So he thinks they've gotten away, so he immediately takes out his sword to kill himself.

“²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.””

Some of you guys have your summer Calvary Chapel t-shirts on and this is the scripture that's on the back of your t-shirt. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him (in other words, they shared the Gospel) and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.””

They obviously thought better of this whole thing and decided just to release them.

“³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” ³⁷ But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.” ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.” Stop there for a moment.

The reason that the magistrates were so alarmed when they learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens is that this was unlawful. According to Roman law, if you beat a Roman citizen without a trial, that was a very serious offense. They could have lost their position. They could have themselves be beaten and punished because of it, and it was just a very serious thing.

But I want you to know this is not Paul's pride that is saying, oh no, no, no no. They need to come here and apologize. It can sound like that on the outside, like Paul's kind of getting his back up a little bit and going, No way! They publicly humiliated us, they can publicly apologize. I don't believe it was Paul's pride that was of concern here to him.

I believe it was the Gospel. It was the reputation of the Gospel. Paul wasn't as concerned about exonerating himself as much as he wanted to exonerate the gospel message because these are brand new believers. And for the magistrates to come out now and publicly apologize, that proves beyond a shadow that they were wrong in what they did and it is not the Gospel that is a problem.

Well, I think it goes without saying here that one of the most powerful portions of this section. We've just read is What Luke relates to us here in this chapter, verse 25, where he says that it was at midnight that Paul and Silas, in that prison beaten, bloody, wounds unattended, feet in stocks. It says they were in the inner part of the prison, so there's no light coming in there. They are in pitch dark, in probably a horribly uncomfortable position, wounds that are, I am assuming throbbing on their bodies, and they're singing. And they're singing, they're singing praise to God. And it says that all of the prisoners were just quiet listening. It's pretty powerful stuff.

And the reason it's so powerful is because we're all very aware that's not the human tendency when you've been beaten, and publicly humiliated, and your wounds have gone unattended. And now you're chained in a painful position, in the pitch dark, and at midnight, to begin to sing to God.

No, the tendency is to curse those who have caused harm in your life, but that's not what we see Paul and Silas doing. We see them singing and this is Paul simply being true to his word when he wrote to the Romans, and to you and me, he said this in Romans chapter 12,

Romans 12:14 (ESV)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

But guys, Paul's not telling you and me to do something that comes naturally. And what I mean by naturally is from the flesh, from the fleshly man or woman. What comes naturally from the flesh is to be angry and unforgiving, frankly. What comes supernaturally, and that means through the power of the Holy Spirit, is to forgive, and to bless, and to praise God, even in the midst of your pain. That is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

But then again, you and I are called to live supernatural lives. We're not called to live natural lives, you know that? We're not called to live fleshly lives. The world is living in the flesh. They have no choice. They have no choice but to live in the flesh.

You, however, who are born again by the Spirit of God, have a choice. It's not automatic. It's a choice to live, not according to the flesh, but according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. To yield to the Holy Spirit rather than yielding to the flesh.

But boy, I tell you, when the flesh rises up, it's tough to resist, isn't it? All you got to do is just wait. When you're driving home, if somebody cuts you off in traffic and then they give you some obscene gesture through the window, what happens? Oh, you can just feel it, can't you? The flesh just rises up and it's like road rage. I'm ready. I'm ready to wreck my car if I have to. I'm going to run into this person. I'm going to run them off the road.

That's the flesh. And it's just, I tell you, it's just a knee jerk reaction. I don't have to, I don't have to make it happen. It just happens. Been there? Yeah. But there's a choice that you and I have because we are also empowered through the Holy

Spirit of the living God. And that is to respond supernaturally and to show the world a different reality. They're well aware of the worldly reality. Just get on YouTube and put, road rage in the search... People love to post videos of people having road rage. It's just the way things are, it's the way of the world.

But you and I are called by God to live differently. We're to live a different reality than the one the world knows, and when we do, God begins to move powerfully. Just like we see here, instead of cursing, which I think was probably the norm for prisoners in their situation, here's Paul and Silas singing praise to God and praying.

And Luke says, suddenly there was an earthquake. Oh, what interesting timing. And not only did this earthquake kind of shake things just a little bit, it shook things to the point, that the entire foundation of the prison was shaken, and everyone's chains fell off. Isn't that something?

Now there's a significant picture. People's chains falling off. I think that the world thinks that by being angry and unforgiving, they're being strong. But actually what they're doing is they are enslaving themselves every single time they choose the way of the world to be angry, to curse, and to withhold forgiveness, they're actually putting on chains. They are becoming more and more enslaved to their emotions.

But there's this beautiful picture that God shows us here at the end of chapter 16 where Paul and Silas choose a different path and they become free. Not just physically, spiritually as well. They are able to walk out of that prison and be free, and not hold the hurt, and the pain, and the humiliation in their hearts that's only going to enslave them further, but to be free.

And to say, oh, well, we choose a different response, the response of the Holy Spirit. This is what we choose and in so choosing, we become free. And so God just wanted to show the physical reality of that freedom as well and so their chains fell off.

And let me tell you something, people, when you choose today to walk supernaturally, when people have hurt you, and caused you pain and distress, but you choose rather than cursing, to bless, and to forgive, you too will be set free. And you won't have to walk in the pain and slavery of the past, which is the last thing we need, because that's going to do nothing for your Christian witness, let me tell you.

But forgiveness, supernatural love, well, that's something people are going to sit up and take notice about. What in the world is different about you? Well, let me tell you, His name is Jesus, amen.

Let's stand together. If you need prayer, we would be more than happy to pray for you. Come out up front after we're done and we'll have our prayer team up here and we'll pray for you, whatever the need may be.

Father, we thank You so much. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the Holy Spirit who enlivens that Word and moves upon our heart to receive it. And who enables us also to walk it out. And Father God, we need to walk it out. Lord, help us to walk and grow in discernment, to understand when we are being blocked, whether or not it is You or the enemy, and then help us to respond accordingly.

And Lord, when we are hurt, when we are persecuted, when we are offended, show us Lord, the way of heaven. The Spirit led way to bless, to forgive, and to love with a supernatural love and thereby walk in freedom.

We thank You and praise You for the power of this wonderful Word. And we commit our hearts to You in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. And all God's people said together, amen.

God bless you.

Have a good rest of your day.