

## Acts 16:16-25

### The Agony of Glory

6/12/16

*As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." <sup>18</sup> And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. <sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. <sup>20</sup> And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. <sup>21</sup> They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,*

*(Pastor Prays)*

In the Spring of 1940, as the Nazi machine rolled across Europe and country after country capitulated to the overwhelming force of Hitler's crack troops and Panzer divisions, England stood alone as its forces were being driven out of France. A new leader emerged in Britannia. A Prime Minister who knew what it would take to win and was unafraid to stand up to evil. Winston Churchill.

In his first speech to Parliament, he was clear about the future. He famously spoke, “I would say to the House as I've said to those who joined this government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind and many, many long months of struggle and suffering.” It was a promise of ultimate victory through sustained difficulty.

It's much like what Paul would experience on his second missionary journey. It's much like what many of you are living even now. In Christ, there is a promise of ultimate victory but often through sustained difficulty. Let's see the Biblical context and learn.

Paul is on his second journey in Chapter 16. In v. 10, he has a clear call from God to go to Macedonia and there a wealthy woman named Lydia comes to Christ. V. 14 says the Lord opened her heart to listen. That's a great start to the ministry at Philippi. Lydia can help fund this new church plant. But starting in v. 16, in the midst of their faithfulness, things turn really bad for Paul and his team.

And honestly, that's where so many of you are today. You came in just barely hanging on. You're not alone. So many of God's choice servants suffer. So much so that it almost seems that it's by design. Paul even said so back in Lystra in Chapter 14:22: *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

I hope to encourage you today to continue in the faith, learning from Paul.

**Gospel Living Is Costly Living But It's Worth the Cost**

There are a few things to be careful of.

### **Be Careful You Don't Miss Opportunities**

Let's pick up the story in v. 16. They were going to a place of prayer and met a slave girl. *As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.*

(She was) A slave girl, not a rich woman like Lydia. An "indentured servant" means she had been stolen or kidnapped or sold. She had no real value besides what she could provide to her owners. We see a little of that. Luke tells us she had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

This nameless young girl is demon possessed. She's exploited and used. V. 16 indicates she's in high demand because people want their fortunes told. We find out in v. 17-18 that she follows Paul for days, pestering him. She's not at all like Lydia. Lydia was a leading Philippian businesswoman who was already curious about the God of the Bible. If you get Lydia saved, she can really help, but this girl – what can she do? She could read your palm, but that's not very popular in Sunday School. She was at the bottom rung, even had no name. Even her description in v. 16 "Spirit of Divination" is the Spirit of the Python – a snake. It came from the Greek mythology of the snake that guarded the oracles at Delphi. For a church growth expert, she would not be a good target.

But God in His providence interrupted Paul going to prayer. He interrupted his regular routine and He did so for the nameless slave girl. Paul had a mission and a ministry. He had a mandate and yet in the course of his life, God put a lost soul in his path.

He didn't have to go somewhere to be on mission. When his eyes opened in the morning, his mission started and the same is true for you. We gather here on Sundays to worship and it's vital that we do so. But we live the rest of our lives in our daily routine as people carrying the hope of Christ, and especially those of you who are struggling to make ends meet or have been wronged in some capacity. Your joy in the Lord in the midst of suffering is the greatest testament to Gospel power.

So I'm asking you to be careful that, in the midst of struggle, you don't become so inward-focused that you miss the opportunity. Or be careful that you don't spend all your time looking for Lydia so that you miss the slave girl who is following you around. God put her there and she needs Christ. She needs to be freed and valued and loved and shown the Gospel.

Gospel living is costly living. Be careful not to miss opportunities.

### **Be Careful Where You Get the Truth**

Let's go back to the slave girl in the text and watch her as she follows Paul.

In V. 17, do you see what the slave girl is saying? <sup>17</sup> *She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."* What she is saying is absolutely right. The demonized girl was saying things that were true. "Most High God" – That's an Old Testament term. It means "Way to Salvation." It describes Christ.

Satan is the father of lies and the father of lies speaks truth when it suits his purposes. Remember now, this demonized girl in in high demand. She's making a lot of money for her owners. Paul and Silas could have said "the ends justify the means, she's telling the truth, let her speak; We'll never get crowds like this on our own."

I really think this is where Christians must be careful. Just because a snippet of the preacher's sermon contains some truth, that in no way guarantees he's preaching the whole counsel of God, especially in the "prosperity gospel." It's the crack cocaine of Christianity. It promises you fun and success and all you do is end up emotionally hollow and spiritually broke.

Be careful where you get the truth. Not from your feelings or some "Rock Star preacher" with a bad haircut. We go to God's word – His unchanging, uncomfortable word. Be suspicious of a message that's all about *you* and how God can serve *you*. If God is Holy, if Jesus is Lord, then He demands nothing short of your complete submission.

Be suspicious of a message that is more about your *happiness* than God's *Holiness* because that's where your deepest joy will come from. When you get a vision of God's holiness, that drives you to the cross for mercy. In the mercy of God at the cross we find

out that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.

Be careful that you don't miss opportunities. Be careful where you get the truth.

### **Be Careful How You View Bad Times**

I need to go quickly here. Allow me to start reading in v. 17 with comment. Remember that Paul and Silas are doing God's work. They are doing the right things. Let's read v. 17-24. <sup>17</sup> *She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."* <sup>18</sup> *And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."* *And it came out that very hour.* <sup>19</sup> *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.* <sup>20</sup> *And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city.* <sup>21</sup> *They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."* <sup>22</sup> *The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.* <sup>23</sup> *And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.* <sup>24</sup> *Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

Paul and Silas were unjustly punished. The men who beat them were known as *lictors* – which means "paddling." It's where we get the term "30 licks." In v. 23, they received many blows, their backs were reduced to a sticky swollen mass of lacerated skin and dried blood. They were thrown into the squalor of a prison with their backs torn open and all that filth being ground into their open wounds. Their hands and feet were chained.

Notice now in v. 25. *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.* They didn't wallow in self-pity, they didn't plot revenge, they didn't curse their enemies.

Be careful how you view bad times. God is using it for His glory. It's only in Christ that you struggle, where your suffering can make sense. And that is what this invitation is all about.

*(Pastor shares the Gospel and prays)*