

## Acts 16:11-40

**Luke reports:** <sup>11</sup> From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup> From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

<sup>13</sup> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

### Paul and Silas in Prison

<sup>16</sup> Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." <sup>18</sup> She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

<sup>19</sup> When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. <sup>20</sup> They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar <sup>21</sup> by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

<sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

<sup>35</sup> When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." <sup>36</sup> The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

<sup>37</sup> But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

<sup>38</sup> The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. <sup>39</sup> They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. <sup>40</sup> After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

## **Surprising Professions**

October 18, 2020 AM  
Life of Paul

**Acts 16:11-40**

Rev. Richard J. deLange

My dear friends in Christ,

What a joy to see five of our young people profess their faith in Christ this morning! What joy for parents, grandparents, siblings and for the whole church.

These five have much in common—being about the same age, baptized in this congregation, attending the same school for much of their years. You're also all white and middleclass. Those are some obvious similarities.

The obvious dissimilarity is that four of you are young ladies and Josiah is best looking young man in the group! If we dig deeper, though, I know there's a music link with at least 4 of you. We've seen Lynnea on the piano leading some of our worship songs. Similarly, Josiah is from a musical family has played Cello, I believe, here in church. Jessica is a gifted singer. And Brooklynn has also shown her singing skills on a few family music videos with our Zoom worship services. And that leaves Madison. One of these things is not like the others! 😊 I don't know anything about your musical gifts, Madison. But I know you are very friendly and good at volleyball. I also know that Madison and her family moved away from Edmonton and Trinity Church for three years but are back again, which is great. The other four of you have been here all of your life which also great!

It's fun to look at similarities and differences in the people who profess faith in Christ and make up the church. The differences in the people in our Bible reading really stick out. That's probably Luke's intent here in Acts 16. You see, three very different and perhaps unlikely people come to Christ in Philippi.

### **Who Can Come?**

This chapter, first of all, helps us answer the question, "Who can come to Jesus? Who can be a Christian? Are there limits of any kind?"

The short answer is No. There are absolutely no limits on the kinds of people that come to Jesus. Luke's point in our reading is that **Jesus saves all kinds of people**, regardless of nationality, skin colour, gender, wealth or other human standards. Luke wants us to see **what** a difference Jesus makes in the lives of all kinds of people.

Let's start with Lydia. Pastor Hilary called her Lydia the Lady because she was probably dressed very beautifully—in some of the purple clothes she sold. She was probably a bit of an unusual woman in that day where men generally held positions of power. But somehow Lydia had climbed the corporate ladder herself. Or, who knows, maybe the family business was handed down to her. That's not important. We don't know if she was self-employed or sent by the company to run a branch store in Philippi. In any event, we know she was wealthy. Aside from

being a seller of purple cloth associated with the rich, we know that she had a home big enough to house her own family with room to spare for at least four guests—Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke whom she invited to stay with her right after her baptism. And it's likely that they stayed the whole time they were in Philippi.

Philippi is the main city of Macedonia. Each time Paul came to a new city, his usual method of starting the gospel presentation was to find a Jewish synagogue. But there doesn't seem to be one in Philippi. This might explain why Lydia and some other women are gathered at the river. There were very few Jews in Philippi because you needed at least 10 men to start a new synagogue and there doesn't seem to be enough for that so the Jews there are gathering at the river. Lydia is called a Godfearer which means she's a Gentile convert to Judaism. At one point, she was busy chasing the Roman dream of wealth and worldly happiness perhaps. But somewhere along the road of life, she was introduced to the personal God of the Jews, Jahweh. By the time we see her here in Philippi, she has already rejected the gods of the Greek and Roman world in favour of one true God, the Lord Almighty of the Jews. So Paul finds her with other Jewish women and maybe some men worshiping at the river.

Wealthy Lydia, a female Roman citizen and Godfearer in Philippi, who hailed from Thyatira, is welcomed into the family of God. From a human point of view, Lydia had a good pedigree.

Then Luke introduces us to a demon-possessed slave girl with a very poor pedigree. This woman has no social standing whatsoever in that culture. She doesn't even own herself. We can guess fairly accurately that someone like the slave girl would have come from a different country, probably stolen from her home or sold because she was a girl whose parents were very poor and were desperate for money.

In Philippi, she is being used by her owners for their profit. You see, she had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future, says our NIV translation. Literally, the Greek says, "she had 'a python spirit'." According to scholars, this is a reference "to the snake of classical mythology which guarded the temple of (the Greek god) Apollo. Apollo was thought to be embodied in the snake and to inspire 'pythonesses', his female devotees. People regularly went to places like Delphi to ask the priestess of Apollo for advice on everything from getting married to making war." From Apollo some people—like this girl—apparently received the gift of clairvoyance, the ability to sense things that are going to happen or to predict the future. Luke, however, simply says the slave girl is possessed by an evil spirit.

As Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke walk through Philippi, "the girl follows them. One could think that she's just introducing them and providing free advertising as she screams, '*These men are servants of the Most High God*'. You should know, though, that the term for the Most High God was applied by Jews to Yahweh but Greeks used it in reference to Zeus and other gods of their day, like Apollo. So this slave girl possessed by an evil spirit is not clearly advertising the Lord God who Paul is preaching. Some think this is the reason Paul rebukes her.

But stop and think about the stuff going on in the head and heart of this girl. You get torn away from your family or sold. You wonder “What’s wrong with me that my parents would do this to me?” You get mistreated by your owners, perhaps beaten when the profits aren’t what they consider good enough. I’m sure there could be a long list of psychological issues this young lady would have had, in addition to being under the influence of an evil spirit.

What our chapter actually says is that Paul’s heart went out to her. The girl’s shrieks continued *for many days until finally* Paul was *troubled*. According to the NIV he was *annoyed* which certainly means he was deeply ‘disturbed’ but not in the sense of “this girl is driving me nuts!” The Greek verb *dia-po-ne-omai* is more specific than that. It is better to understand that he was troubled in the sense of ‘grieved’ because of the poor girl’s condition and also dismayed by her inappropriate and unwelcome publicity. His distress led him to command the evil spirit to come out of her.

That’s what’s worth noting in this verse. Paul does not say come out in the name of the Most High God. No, he eliminates all confusion about which God he’s talking about when he says, “In name of Jesus Christ, come out of her!” He can’t keep the name of Jesus from flowing through his lips! It’s all about Jesus for Paul and his companions.

Just one more thing about this girl. Luke does not explicitly refer to either her conversion or her baptism. However, the fact that her deliverance took place between the conversions and baptisms of Lydia and the jailer is a pretty clear indication that she also became a member of the Philippian church.

So, thus far, Luke shows us a rich, middle-aged, Roman woman coming to Christ. Then we have this young lady on the lowest rung of the social ladder, a slave-girl, an immigrant without documentation and possessed by an evil spirit who is mercifully delivered by Jesus.

And now we come to the middleclass man in our story: the jailer. Jailers were normally army veterans. After serving in the Roman military, they might retire to a less intense job at the jail because they still needed to earn a living. Roman soldiers were tough guys. Just think of how Jesus was beaten and even Paul and Silas are ordered to be stripped and beaten with rods. That was the job of the Roman soldiers. Beating and killing was all in a day’s work for these men.

As a jailer, you perhaps didn’t engage in as much brutality but you still had responsibility. You might wonder as a modern reader why the jailer is about to kill himself when he awakens from the earthquake and discovers that the jail doors are all open. It seems to me that he’d have a pretty good explanation for his superiors about why the prisoners escaped. It’s not his fault that an earthquake shook the place that night and tore open all the doors! But that didn’t matter to the Roman authorities. The rule was that if the prisoner escapes under your watch, you are responsible. And failure to do your job could result in death. He had been commanded the night before to “guard them carefully.”

Tough as this man was on the outside, he was a nervous mess on the inside. He was not prepared to face the magistrates after the prisoners had escaped. He knew from what he'd seen and heard before that his life was certainly on the line. So rather than let other soldiers put him to death, he was going to fall on his own sword and end it quickly. But God had mercy on him. The Lord Jesus came to him through Paul and Silas and he was saved. This tough guys on the outside, husband, father, family provider and civil servant was welcomed into the family of God through the redeeming grace of Christ alone.

What Luke shows us through these three people is that anyone is welcome to come to God through Jesus. God draws us in by his spirit and the gospel, using people like Paul and Silas and you and me. So come to Jesus. Join these three in our Bible reading and join the five young people from our church here today. Bow the knee to Jesus, receive his grace and enjoy his presence, peace and power all the days of your life.

### **What Can We Expect?**

Now that we've seen who can come to Jesus, let's look briefly at what we can expect when we do so.

The first and most obvious thing we can expect when we turn to Jesus is **salvation** of course.

But salvation in this chapter isn't exactly what we first think of with our 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian minds. We note in the words of the slave girl from v.17, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." What did she mean by that? And later we read that the Philippian jailer asks in v.30, "What must I do to be saved?" What is he asking?

Salvation was a popular topic of conversation in those days. But it meant different things to different people. You see, say scholars, "'God Most High', to someone living in Philippi, wouldn't mean the God of Abraham, the One God of Jewish monotheism." That seems obvious. Instead, it "would mean Zeus (or Apollo) or whoever people thought of as the top god in the local pantheon. And 'salvation' wouldn't mean what it meant to a Jew or a Christian, entry into the world of God's new creation, overcoming corruption, sin and death. It would mean 'health' or 'prosperity' or 'rescue' from some kind of disaster" in this life. (NT Wright)

We don't read here of Paul giving a Christian definition of salvation but we can be certain he did as he instructed and baptized believers in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Christian definition of salvation surpasses a mere rescue from trouble in this world. It is eternal life through Jesus Christ. That first of all.

But salvation also includes things that we experience in this life already. Things like the peace of Christ that passes all understanding. Look, for example, at

the peace Paul and Silas had in jail. They knew they could be put to death in the morning but are they freaking out? No. Amazingly, with lacerated backs and aching limbs, Paul and Silas are *praying and singing hymns to God* at midnight. Not groans but songs flow from their lips because they have the peace of Christ.

In addition, salvation changes our view of life and what's important now. Lydia and the jailer are saved and immediately they both open their homes to strangers. Yes, strangers are immediately friends. When the Lord opens their heart, they open their homes. There is love, acceptance, friendship and fellowship. That's why I think it's safe to assume that the young slave girl is also embraced by the church and cared for. This is part of the salvation we experience here and now already. There's no concern about race, colour, ethnicity, gender or economic status. We are all one in Christ. We are family. We belong to one another so we care for one another. The idea of survival of the fittest is not a mark of the church. It is loving one another, breaking bread together and sharing what God has given.

But there's more. We would be missing something in our reading if we didn't acknowledge that one of the things we might get out of following Jesus, one of the things we can expect other than all the richness of Christ's salvation, is opposition. Opposition is spiritual pushback.

One writer gives this modern illustration:

A friend of mine, a few years after being ordained, was sent to work in an inner city suburb where, for a long time, vice had reigned unchecked. ...Drugs, sex and stolen goods of all sorts were readily available; petty and not-so-petty crime flourished. And my friend... began to preach the **gospel** (there).

His preaching had an impact. People on the street took notice. Some came to **faith**, and began to pray for the neighbourhood. More people came to believe the gospel. Addicts and prostitutes started to drop in to the church; people would pray with them and try to help them out of their damaging and dehumanizing lifestyles.

But then, before too long, the **unofficial** powers that ran the area began to take notice as well. Threatening letters started to arrive. Objects were hurled through windows. And, more sinister still, my friend was struck down with a mysterious illness. For a while he was completely incapacitated. He was only healed through urgent and prolonged prayer.

*You see, he had walked* into a spiritual field of force and began to challenge it. The dark powers that had run the place for many years were striking back.

That is how it often happens. *Not always, of course*; many people go through an entire lifetime of faithful ministry without anything like this ever coming near them; but it does sometimes happen.

The point is that we can expect opposition if we profess faith in Jesus and seek to follow him in this life. As certainly as Jesus faced opposition for our sake—even going to the cross—so Paul and his friends and you and me today can face

spiritual pushback. Yes, it might look different in the ghetto than it does in middleclass Edmonton. But we should not be afraid when it comes. Look at Paul and Silas singing in jail after they had serious pushback. It started with the slaveowners being upset. Then they took their complaint to city hall and added the racism card—these men are Jews advocating customs we Romans don't accept. Quickly that led to official sanction, including beating and imprisonment.

When we get serious about letting our salvation in Christ bear fruit, when we obey the prompting of the Spirit and go to Macedonia as Paul did, or end up in the inner city as the pastor in the previous story, we might get some pushback. As we stand up for Christian morality today, we are often quickly labelled bigots in our society or Bible-Thumpers. Even when we stand up for Jesus in our schools today and in our work places, we can face pushback from those who feel that Jesus' way of life threatens them. The pushback will look different for each of us.

The point is that it can be tough to allow our profession of faith in Jesus to move us to bold action. But don't let fear stop you from doing what the Spirit of Jesus puts on your heart. Remember how Paul and Silas bumped around hitting closed doors before getting the message to go to Macedonia. They went in the power of the Spirit. And the Spirit gave them courage and boldness. The Holy Spirit opened hearts as they preached and worked in Philippi, people bowed the knee to Jesus. Lives were changing.

At the same time, the unholy spirit pushed back but Paul and Silas and you and me can go forward with boldness in the confidence that Christ is with us. I don't say this to create guilt or fear in us but to give us a renewed sense of Christ's love and his Spirit's power in us.

The Spirit changed Lydia. He opened her heart and her calling became opening her home to the gospel preachers and her wallet to supporting and advancing ministry. She became a cheerleader and cheerful supporter of Paul and his friends and the First Church of Philippi. Because Paul and Silas had compassion for the slave girl, God used them to change her life. And because they did that, they were thrown in prison where God had other plans to use them yet again to touch the heart of the jailer.

Like Paul, some of us are called to the frontlines of the work and, like Lydia, others are called to support it. I'm sure the slave girl and the jailer also found their place to serve in the church.

So today's message is, "Everyone can come to Jesus and he will save us all. He'll forgive, strengthen, equip and use us. And, yes, he will use us ALL. Leave it to the Spirit working in your heart to lead you to serve. Just listen and do what he puts on your heart. Then trust him to help you accomplish it, whether it's up front or behind the scenes, whether it means facing strong opposition or being the support team for those at the front lines. Jesus saves and Jesus remains with us. Be bold living out your profession of faith. Be confident. Go forward and fear not. Amen.