

need fellowship and encouragement.

The apostles could have done many things in Philippi. They could have demanded justice from the slave owners who had assaulted them. They could have insisted on a public apology from the magistrates. But there was only one thing that they devoted their time to before moving on. That thing was to see the little gathering of Christ's people, and to cheer them and persuade them to carry on. We do not know how big the gathering was. There was Lydia and the jailer, and their households; maybe the slave girl, and others known to them too. But they had only had the apostles' teaching for a few weeks or maybe even days. It does seem that Luke was left behind in Philippi, as he stops speaking of "us" and starts referring to "them". Luke only says "we" and "us" again when the missionaries come back to Philippi in chapter 20. So it seems that Paul and Silas left in place the arrangements for the church to continue to grow and prosper. Quite probably they exhorted the church to recognise Luke as their minister, and to hear the word which he taught. In short, they loved the church, and did all things for its good. In doing so they had the mind of Christ, who gave himself to the death of the cross for it. In doing so they thought like the Father, who had delivered up his only Son to make it his own.

We must ask ourselves, whether we have the same mind? We live in a time when everybody thinks about themselves, and their individual rights. Few consider the good of the groups which God has created in the family, or in the state. And even fewer think about God's most precious gathering, the church. How many Christians treat their churches like they do their shops! They go there to get something, if they think they need it, and if time allows. If they find something to dislike, then they try another one, and go there instead. In doing so, they deeply grieve God by their selfish ways. God's will is that we should love the family in which he has placed us. It may have many faults, and indeed it does - just as we do individually too. But God has not treated us as our sins and failings deserve, and neither should we do to our brethren. We should care for the church more than we care for any other thing. We should invest more prayer, energy and free time in the welfare of God's saints than anywhere else. In doing so, we will prove whether or not we have the mind of Christ too. Let us be convinced of this, and change our lives accordingly.

Expository thoughts on **The Acts Of The Apostles**

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 12 (Chapter 16)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

(For previous weeks' notes, visit <http://www.gracebelper.org.uk/readingnotes.php>)

Acts 16:1-10

1 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. 6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Now the secondary missionary journey begins. What a journey this is, and how much we owe to it. Paul had not planned at this time to preach in Europe. But God had! It is to this journey that we must trace the history of our own continent. How different the history of the world might be, if Paul had gone east instead of west. We may be familiar with the names of many places on this journey. Here, we encounter Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus. What Christian has never heard that they should "search the Scriptures daily, like the Bereans" or of the Philippian jailer who cried out, "What must I do to be saved?". Who could not be stirred to hear Paul declaring to the wise men of Athens that they must repent and trust in the resurrected Son of God? These are words full of drama and glorious gospel advance.

Let us note firstly that *the gospel advances despite great setbacks*. The parting of Paul and Barnabas was certainly a tragic one. These two men had been through thick and thin together. They had worked side by side, through persecution, and seen great blessing. But now a dispute over John Mark had parted them. Yet in these verses Luke tells us that that setback did not hold back the gospel at all. First of all, another helper for the missionaries was found. Timothy was added to the missionary band. He would become one of Paul's most beloved helpers (1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2). Verse 5 is another of the summaries Luke loved to put in. The Holy Spirit tells us that "the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." The visits for encouragement were a great success. And these missionaries would not just encourage the churches planted on the previous trip: they would also plant new ones, in Greece.

We must not lose heart or give up when we see great problems for the work of the gospel. These things have always been. But God is sufficient for us in all of them. His work goes on, even though the men involved are very imperfect. There are setbacks, and problems everywhere. But God is greater than them all. Let us not give way to the sin of despair. God is testing our faith. He is purifying it, so that it may come forth like gold. Let us press on, whatever may come. Our labour in the Lord shall never be in vain (1 Corinthians

stripes washed. Now, the next day dawned. The magistrates had probably been woken up by the earthquake too. Did they wonder if it was connected with the men they had imprisoned the previous day? We do not know. But we do know that the magistrates had no real grounds to keep them in prison any more. The slave owners had been satisfied by the beating and committal to the jail, but there was no evidence for a proper trial. In the morning, they sent word that the missionaries should be let go. This portion tells us what happened next.

What Paul did shows us that *it is right for Christians to make a fuss when it is truly for the kingdom of God*. When the word releasing them came to the prison, we might have thought that the missionaries would be grateful. We might expect them to immediately depart, thanking God. But they did not do so; they did the very reverse. They stayed put, and demanded that the magistrates themselves come and see them! But we can be sure that they were not doing it to be awkward. Paul had suffered far too much already to have any love of trouble for its own sake. They did it because they knew that when they left Philippi, the small gathering of believers would be left behind. They understood that if the authorities were allowed to treat Christians with violence with no regard to the law, great evil would result. They had arrived in the province of Macedonia, and needed to show that Christians were law-abiding people. Their enemies had accused them of being enemies of the authority of the state. They needed to show that they were far more concerned for righteousness in the land than their accusers were. By insisting on their Roman rights, they would lay a marker down. The church would be protected, and their own freedom (which they would use to preach the gospel) would too.

There is a great deal of talk about our rights today. People everywhere are making the most selfish and unreasonable demands, because they say that they have rights to do so. Much of this talk is pure hot air. Most of our land lives without God, and live without all reference to him. The common teaching in our schools is that we all evolved out of a lifeless pond, and have no essential differences from the beasts. We wonder how such beings could have any rights at all - let alone the incredible array of rights now claimed! We must very much avoid the selfish way of thinking that much talk about "rights" involves. But on the other hand, we must remember that we have been made in the image of God. And God has also given power to the state to govern and rule (Romans 13:1-8). And as such, we are granted rights by them, which can be used if it is wise. The general rule is to "live at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). We must "study to be quiet" (1 Thessalonians 4:11). But sometimes, others might be harmed if we keep quiet. Christ's little flock might suffer loss. In such cases, we must insist on what is upright - even if we hate the trouble it brings. We must "do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit" (Philippians 2:3). This can be very hard. It needs much wisdom. We too easily think that our own desires are also God's, and that our pride and temper are pleasing to him. We easily corrupt a good cause for our own glory. Let us ask God to humble us, so that our eyes are always fixed upon him.

Let us notice secondly what Paul did next. The magistrates came, and pleaded with him. He did not then insist on humiliating them, or refuse any of their demands. Indeed, after seeing the Christians again, he departed as they had asked. He could have stayed and spread the news of their evil deeds, and they could have lost their jobs and even lives. But he did not. He showed them far greater kindness than they did to him. But he did not leave before he had visited the believers, and encouraged them. This is our lesson: *Christians*

careless self-seeking, can we gain some confidence that conversion has really taken place. These are such serious things! Let us examine ourselves, and see how it is with us.

Finally, let us allow the jailer to teach us that *saved people ought to rejoice!* If this change of nature has really taken place, it cannot really be any other way. If we now see and appreciate spiritual things, we must do so. If we truly know the terribleness of our guilt, and the incredible value of Jesus' death on the cross, and the reality of God's love towards us in him, how can we not be full of praise? When this prison guard believed, he was very glad, and immediately put on a meal. The Holy Spirit has taken care to record that he rejoiced, because he now believed in God (verse 34). He was now right with his maker, and that is the greatest of all things.

Christianity is not meant to be a dour and drab affair. Christians ought to be people who find it difficult to stop smiling! True religion is nothing like the sad and hard thing which those in the world imagine it to be. False religion indeed is a very heavy burden, and we can well understand that it makes people sad. To have to work off our own sins is an impossible task. We can never get any peace of conscience or assurance through it. No matter how much we flog our bodies, or chasten our souls, we will never break our own way through to God by it. But if we are truly in Christ, then Christ has done everything on our behalf.

It is to be feared that we have too few happy thoughts about Christ, because we have too few serious thoughts against sin. We feel our guilt too little, and value Christ's sufferings in proportion. May it not be so! If we are saved, then let us remember when we first believed, and the release of joy that there was to know that God was satisfied. The account was paid, Christ was ours, and glory was to come. Surely it is because our minds and hearts are still too much in this present world, that we have less of heaven's joy with us. Let us reject such a way; let us look to the Saviour who loves us so much, and be glad in him.

Acts 16:35-40

*35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."
36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."
37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."
38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.
39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.
40 So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.*

What a night it has been in Philippi! Paul and Silas have been in the most miserable prison, but singing and praying out loud to God. There has been an earthquake and the prison doors flung open, but nobody escaped. The jailer woke up and drew his sword to kill himself - but was saved by Paul's intervention. In a moment, a harsh and hard man completely opened up to God, and cried out to be saved. A careless pagan had heard the gospel of Christ, and been completely changed. Paul and Silas had been fed, and had their

15:58).

Let us see secondly in this passage *Paul's flexibility when principles were not at stake.* We have just read about the Jerusalem council. The great issue there was circumcision. Must the Gentiles be circumcised to be saved? The true gospel had won the day; the nations could come into the church, as they were, needing only faith in Christ. But with Timothy, there was a different problem. He was uncircumcised whilst his mother was Jewish. The Jews in the cities they were to visit would think of him as an enemy of Judaism. A lot of unnecessary trouble would be stirred up. Much useless controversy would hinder Jews from hearing the gospel's true message. To avoid this, Paul took Timothy and circumcised him. No great principle was at stake. He was not being circumcised to be saved. Neither was he being circumcised to bring some extra blessing from God. He was simply doing it to avoid wasting effort and distracting Jews from the gospel. What great wisdom this was! Paul showed by it where his heart really lay. When the gospel was at stake, his principles were inflexible. But when no principle was being risked, he was prepared to do whatever would help. Lesser men would have not done what Paul had done. Having stood against circumcision at Jerusalem, they would have carried on standing against it everywhere. Often we go too far in our principles. We carry them into areas where they really do not apply. We become proud because of them, and want to assert them, even when they are not really at stake. Let us note Paul's example, and seek to do the same. If God's truth is being risked, we must not move an inch. If it is merely a matter of convenience that may give the gospel some help, let us be willing to move a long way.

The third thing to notice in these verse is *God's sovereignty in the spread of the gospel.* In future years it would be his will for the gospel to advance in Asia. Ephesus would play a very important part in the New Testament history. But as yet, it was not his time. The missionaries were forbidden. We do not know why this took place, but it did. God intended to guide the missionaries to Europe, and to plant many churches there. This must have seemed very mysterious to Paul and his company at the time. They must have felt led to discouragement because doors were closing upon them. They had risked all to preach Christ - but the opportunity was being taken away from them. But God had something bigger in mind. Unknown to them, God had prepared hearts on the other side of the sea, in Greece. Secretly, God was preparing a much larger advance for the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. We must meditate upon this. All our efforts may seem to come to nothing. We may wonder why the Lord is not blessing his own word; but he knows what he is doing, and he does all things well. Let us trust him - the gospel will advance!

Finally, these words teach us that *what people really need is the gospel of Christ.* Paul had a dream, in which a man asked him for help. What did Paul conclude? Not that that man was poor in body. Not that he needed money, or work. Those things may well have been true! But the help which Paul put first was that of the gospel of Christ. "We sought to go Macedonia" - why? "Concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them."

We cannot put too much value upon people's souls. They may be poor, starving and homeless - yet their lost condition in the sight of God is a worse problem still. Whether we are millionaires or penniless, the great question is this: are we in saving union with Jesus Christ? Has his precious blood cleansed us from the guilt of our sins? Has God credited the perfection of his Son to our account? Are we going to spend eternity with Christ in glory,

or without him in hell? A day will come when whatever we were or had in this world will count for nothing. The only question will be - did we repent, and trust in the Lord Jesus? Let us ask ourselves that question today, and every day. It is the one question that matters more than every other.

Acts 16:11-15

11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, 12 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. 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. 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptised, 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.

At this point, Luke has joined the travelling preachers. "They" and "them" have become "we" and "us". Details of the journey are given. We suppose that Luke himself was living in Troas at that time. Probably at this time he learnt a great deal about the church's history from Paul, first hand. We are now reading not just the words of a careful historian, but a first-hand witness. And by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are reading the very words of the living God. Let us approach them with care.

Philippi was a privileged and important city within Macedonia. It had the status of a colony. But it does not appear to have had a synagogue. There do not seem to have been the ten Jewish men needed to begin one. Throughout Acts, we find Paul going to the synagogue to preach (e.g. 9:20, 13:4, 13:14, 14:1). But we do not read that here. There was apparently no synagogue, so they went "out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made". There is a lesson to learn from this. *When we cannot do very much, yet we should still do what we can.* Or put another way, though we do not get the opportunities we would like, we must take the ones we do get. We should not say "we can only do a little - therefore we shall do nothing". Paul did not find a place with plenty of his fellow Jews to declare Christ to. But he did find a little group of God-fearers, probably mostly women, gathered by the river for prayer. And so he spoke about the way of salvation to them. God honoured that witness - "the Lord opened [Lydia's] heart", and she and her household all believed and were baptised. The church in Philippi began there and then.

Here is something we need to hear in our "day of small things". It can take much more effort to gain an opportunity to talk about Christ than it did in previous generations. Religious subjects and conversations arise less and less. The numbers of those willing to come to gospel meetings are much smaller, but we must not give up because of this. We must believe that the Lord is still mighty and powerful to save. We must believe that if we are faithful, then he will prove faithful too. We must not use the hardship of our circumstances as an excuse for laziness. The Lord is not looking to us to do miracles; he has not prepared the same works for all of his servants to do. But what opportunities he has given us, we must use. He will require an account from us for it. We will likely find that

learn from it that *the way of salvation is very simple*. Salvation is not very far off, and impossible to be had. It is very near, and can be had by anyone who simply believes on Christ. Salvation is certainly an incredibly difficult thing. To take away the anger of an infinitely holy and just God, is the most awesome work. But it is a work which has been done! The price was infinitely high - but the Lord Jesus Christ has paid it, by offering himself upon the cross. Indeed, God himself paid it, sending his one and only beloved Son into the world, that he might suffer and die on behalf of sinners. For Christ it was extremely costly; but for us, it costs nothing at all. We are simply called upon to understand that he has done all of this, to believe that it is true, and to rest upon it all and nothing else. This is the good news, and it is good news for all. It was good news for pious, God-fearing Jews. And it was just the same for wicked pagans who had abused and scorned the servants of God. They were offered salvation on precisely the same terms: free, if they would just believe. Jews and Gentiles, Pharisees and jailers, respectable and depraved - Christ came to die for sinners out of every part of the human race. And every person in the human race needs to simply hear the "word of the Lord" (verse 32) spoken to them, so that they might believe too.

Have we understood this? We do not have to cross an ocean, or climb up to heaven ourselves, to be saved. Indeed, to try to do so would be to insult the Saviour who has suffered so awfully to purchase this salvation. Have we received this message, and come to the Lord Jesus? He will receive us if we do; he loves to save, even the most unworthy. Let us come to him, and prove it to be so!

A second thing to see in these verses is that *conversion is more than forgiveness alone*. That is, those who Christ pardons, he also changes. Conversion is a "package deal"! We have the record of our offences wiped out - but we also receive the Holy Spirit, and become new people inside. We are given a new nature, which must inevitably show itself. Just as the old nature showed itself in selfishness and hard-hearted uncaring sin, so the new nature will show itself in acts of selfless love. It was so with the Philippian jailer. Once he received the word of the Lord, his behaviour to the prisoners changed straight away. Before, he had imprisoned them with open wounds. Now, he took them into his own house, and washed their stripes himself. Before, he had cared nothing for them. Now, he fed them and treated them like his own family. Until now, he had cared nothing for the God of Israel. But upon being converted, he was straight away baptised in the name of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. What a turn-around this was! It proved the reality of his faith. He had not asked how to be saved just on a whim - it was a real work of the Spirit of God within his heart.

Do we know this? We can easily make a mistake here. We hear God's ministers saying that salvation is very easy, and that we must simply believe. And then we suppose that because we nod our heads to it as a fact, that therefore all must be well with our own souls. But we may not have truly come to Christ, and rested upon his finished work. We may well still be imagining that sin is not that serious after all, and that is why it may be so easily forgiven. We may still be thinking that God accepts us, because there is little difficulty in him doing so. We have to learn that faith is more than just the believing of certain facts. It involves a change in the whole person, turning to and bowing to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. It is only really present when the Holy Spirit is at work, changing us within. The final proof of it is in the change of life that results. Only when self-giving service replaces laziness and

that we might be saved. As he awoke, he became aware that the doors were opened, and that the prisoners' chains had been released. He believed in that moment that the prisoners had escaped, and that he would be publicly shamed for his failure of duty. He had received a solemn charge (verse 24), and was now possibly facing a penalty of death for his failure to keep it. But then, he heard a voice cry out. It was that of Paul; all the prisoners were still there, and not one had escaped! The voice was full of concern for him, and urged him to do himself no harm. Suddenly, the jailer saw the enormity of his own wickedness. He had played a full part in punishing and hurting innocent men. He had cared nothing for these prisoners; with open wounds he had placed them in the innermost jail. They, though, had saved his life. They had been given an open door to escape, but out of concern for him, had not done so. They had not allowed him to harm himself, but were full of concern for his well-being. In a moment, he saw the incredible contrast between his own hard and sinful heart, and the immense love he had been shown. He remembered that these men claimed to be the servants of the true God. He had himself seen the joy and peace in their lives, which the salvation they claimed to preach had brought. He had probably heard them singing their hymns, and overheard their prayers to God before he slept. He had stared death in the face, but had been saved. He was forced to face the fact that his conscience alone condemned him to hell, and God would do so much more. He had looked straight into the pit of eternal punishment, and knew that was where he was heading. And so he cried out those marvellous words, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (verse 30).

What a good thing it would be for us if we saw the enormity of our sin too! How many of us are carrying on like the jailer was before midnight, secure and asleep, thinking that we have little to be concerned over. Good it would be for us, if we could see our eternal condition, before it is too late. Oh, let us pray that God would show us the wretchedness of the unconverted state, so that we might flee to Christ! Let us seriously seek to discover just what sin is before a holy and infinite God, so that we might discover the value of Jesus' precious blood! Let us try to understand that without Christ we are under God's wrath and eternally damned, so that we might also cry out, to know how we could be saved!

Acts 16:31-34

31 So they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptised. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

We have read about the Philippian jailer. We have learnt about the earthquake, and the conviction of sin which came upon him. We have heard the marvellous question which he asked to his prisoners. How the tables were then turned! No longer was he the powerful tyrant who could do with them as he pleased. Now he was the man in chains, with no way of releasing himself. Now these poor despised Jews were those with what he desperately needed, and he was at their mercy. In these verses, we read about the reply which they gave him.

Paul and Silas' answer was very simple. It could be summed up in very few words. Let us

our opportunity is far larger than we realised. Most probably we will discover that when we use what we have got, we receive far more. The reason why some Christians have little opportunity is because they have never used what they already have. They have not proved to be faithful with a little, and so Christ has not given them any more.

The second thing to see in these verses is that *conversion is a work which can happen very differently in different people.* In many before, the work was very spectacular and noisy. When Peter preached at Pentecost, the crowds cried out: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (2:37). In the cities Paul had been to, there had been riots, mobs and great violence. But here at Philippi, Lydia was converted in a much quieter way. We are simply told: "The Lord opened her heart to heed". We do not read anything about great and sudden pangs of conscience. Luke does not record that she cried out in great agony under conviction of her sin. We are simply told that she heard, believed, and trusted in the Saviour who was being preached.

We must remember that the great question we need to answer is not "have you had a great experience?" The way into heaven does not always involve great violence or struggle. But it does always involve trusting in Jesus Christ. We may not be able to pin-point the day when we first believed. We may not have had months of agony over our sins before it. But that is not the question. The question is whether today we are repenting of our sin, and trusting in his death upon the cross? Are we bowing before him as our Lord today, regardless of how we got here? Sometimes Christians can make a mistake here. Satan can get an advantage from us. We imagine that because another was converted in a very wonderful way, and because we were not, therefore we may still be unsaved. But this is not the Bible's teaching. The Bible shows us a great variety in how people came to Christ. The Philippian jailer cried out in terror (16:30). Lydia's heart was quietly opened. James and Jesus' other half-brothers took many years before they believed (John 7:5); Lydia trusted the first time she ever heard Jesus' name. The variety is very wonderful! God has different ways with each of his own. No one of them can be made a rule for others. The question is not whether we were saved like others have been. The question is whether we are saved at all. Have we repented of our sins? Do our lives show evidence of change? Is the work of the Holy Spirit in making us like Jesus visible to ourselves and others? Are we relying on the Son of God as our only hope for life and eternity to come?

Lastly, we see from this passage that *the reality of conversion is shown by a changed life.* When Lydia came to the Lord, she proved that it was real by the hospitality that she then showed to the apostles. She opened her home to them, and invited them to stay. It seems from verse 15 that they were reluctant at first. But we read "she persuaded us". Lydia knew that she owed everything, under God, to these men. She was not going to lose the chance to bring blessing to them too. They had blessed her eternally; she would give them what temporal help she could. Surely too she was eager to learn more about the Lord Jesus. Surely she desired to understand all that she could about Christian teaching, and how to please her Saviour. And so she prevailed upon them, to stay.

We must understand what salvation is. It is not simply to be saved from the punishment for our sins. It is deliverance from sin itself. It is a very large work. Jesus has died and endured God's wrath against our wrongdoing. But that is not all he has done. He also sends his Holy Spirit, to deliver us from sin's continuing power. He himself comes to live with us, to turn

our lives away from sin to righteousness. And he is coming again, to complete and perfect that work. He is coming to wipe away every last stain and trace of sin. He has paid its penalty. He is delivering us from its power. He will at last abolish its presence. It is a salvation from the whole of sin - what a glorious thing! But that means that we must examine ourselves. Are we in fact, turning away from sin? Is its grip upon us being loosened? We are not talking here just about the most horrible outward sins. Christ's work is directed against all, and every sin. The thoughts of our hearts; the words from our lips, even those which nobody else hears. Are our desires strong and hot towards God, and full of hatred towards sin? How is the work of God going on in us? I fear that many who count themselves Christians are deluded. I am afraid that a good number of "evangelical" churches are filled with unbelievers. Their profession is in word only. There is little evidence of real grace in their lives. Surely these things are so. How else can we explain the desperate state of our land? If all of our Christianity is real, why are our churches like they are? The answer is only too plain. Many believers are believers in name only. May God grant that nobody who reads these words remains in such a state! Let us look carefully at ourselves. Do we really love Christ? Do our hearts really beat after his? Are we grieved by every sin, because it is sin? Are our lives changing? May God help us to know what we really are.

Acts 16:16-19

16 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. 17 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". 18 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. 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.

Paul and his companions are still in Philippi. Lydia had persuaded the missionaries to remain with her. Together, they are going to prayer. We do not know exactly how they were working in that city. Were they engaging God-fearing people in conversation at the riverside? Were they seeking out those who would discuss in the marketplace? How many were now seeking the Lord because of this? How many were now part of the church at Philippi? We do not know these things. The Spirit of God chose to pass over them. Instead, he fixed upon the events which led to Paul and Silas being imprisoned, and the jailer being converted. Let us study to see what we may gain for our own souls.

In these verses we see *Christ confronting and overcoming the powers of darkness*. The missionaries are now quite outside of the Jewish world. There are so few truly godly people here, that not even one synagogue could be formed. Living as we do after many centuries of Christian influence, we can hardly imagine how bad the darkness once was. In Philippi, there was a slave girl actually possessed by an evil spirit. What a miserable life she must have led. She was owned by masters who cared little for her, except in so far as she brought them some money. The words that the girl cried out are quite hard to understand. Did they come from her, or from the spirit? Was she hoping to gain help from the missionaries; or was the spirit seeking to discredit their message by associating it with

when he cried out "What must I do to be saved?"

The first thing which we notice in this passage is *God's sovereignty*. Paul and Silas, like the Jewish apostles before them, were now in prison (5:18). This is the fourth imprisonment that Luke has recorded. But each time has been different. Peter and John had remained in prison until their trial (4:3-7). An angel released the apostles and told them to preach in public (5:18-20). Peter had been freed on the eve of his death and told to flee in secret (12:11). Now, God intervenes, but not through an angel - but rather by an earthquake. Some things remained just the same: the apostles suffered for the name of Jesus. But other things changed each time.

We must learn that God cannot be tied to any one means. He is absolutely free to do as he pleases. Every situation is different, and his wisdom chooses the perfect course each time. We ought to admire and bow before such sovereign freedom. We should trust that God will always do what is right.

The second thing we should learn is that *God's providence is not always the same as God's guidance*. That is, what God allows to happen is not always a clue as to what God wants us to do. God is free to do as he pleases; but we must never jump to conclusions and take easy ways out. When the earthquake happened in Philippi, the prison doors were opened, "and everyone's chains were loosed" (verse 26). I wonder what we would have done, upon seeing that? Would we not have said, "God has released us - we ought to go free? A divine intervention has opened the doors - God must want us to escape through them?" But Paul and Silas did not do so. If they had done, then the consequences would have been very different. The Philippian jailer would have killed himself, instead of being saved. Paul and Silas would have shown that they did disrespect the law, and lost their integrity and innocence. The enemies of the gospel would have been pleased; God would have been dishonoured. Paul and Silas' imprisonment was wrong; but two wrongs do not make a right. God does not give us permission to take such things into our own hands. God's intervention this time was indirect; the apostles had to use their own wisdom in response.

This is a lesson which Christians today need to take special notice of. There are many odd ideas around about God's guidance and how he leads us. Many sincere believers have taken in false teachings. Such false teachings have often given the appearance of respectability to downright sin. Something has been forbidden by God's word - but some strange event occurs, and it is taken as if it were a new word from heaven! God has said "No" in his Bible, but some mysterious prompting leads us to believe that he has changed his mind. But God does not change his mind. What he has spoken in Scripture, he does not intend to alter in any way at all. The Bible only must be our rule, and everything else is to be examined with wisdom. Just because a thing happens, does not mean that the rules have changed. What is happening may very well be a test. God may be finding out whether we will take the easy way out that appears to us, or if we will be faithful and choose the hard way. We may be being proved, to show us what we really are. Let us then make sure that we are grounded in God's word, and be convinced that if we walk by it, we shall never be put to shame.

Thirdly, learn from the Philippian jailer that *we need to see the enormity of our sin, so*

The sad truth is that such things are very common, and they always will be, until Christ returns. The world we live in is one which is very corrupt. The question often asked by those who have authority is "what suits me best?" rather than "what is right and just?". Few consider the honour and glory of God; fallen man much prefers to please himself. It is very grievous - but it is so. We must not give way to despair because of it; nor should we indulge in bitterness and resentment. Paul and Silas did neither of these. We must rather take our case to God. We must rejoice in him, that the judge of all the earth will do right (Genesis 18:25). We must remember that there is a day of reckoning coming, when every wrong will be accounted for. We must remember that we ourselves have corrupt and deceitful hearts, and but for the grace of Jesus Christ would be involved in every kind of wicked thing. We must pray for our enemies and do good to them, and so heap burning coals upon their heads. We must overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19-21).

Finally, let us learn from Paul and Silas that *we can rejoice in God at all times*. We might think they had many reasons to feel sorry for themselves. We can easily see how we would give way to sins of grumbling, discontent and self-pity. But they did not do so. Some years later, Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, and told them to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). That sounds like a fine idea - but it was much more than an idea to Paul. Paul had learnt, in whatever state he was, to be content (Philippians 4:11). He had discovered the secret - and that secret was Christ (Philippians 4:13). His and Silas' eyes were fixed upon God, to whom they prayed and sang hymns (verse 25). The unbeliever has many reasons to be miserable. He has no sins forgiven; he has no peace with God. He is cut off from knowing God in this life, and will be damned forever by him in the next. But the believer has no such cause. The Son of God has loved him and shed his precious blood on his behalf. The Father has made him an heir, a co-heir with Christ. The Spirit has come to make his home with us, and to pour out the love of God in our hearts. It is true that sadness and troubles will often come our way in this fallen world. The Lord Jesus Christ himself wept (John 11:35). But even in our distresses, we should be able to rejoice. If we have any idea of the enormity of our sin, and the greatness of the gift given to us at Calvary, we should be joyful every day. If we understand the gospel, and have rested upon the Saviour, then we have something that nothing at all can outweigh. So let us ask ourselves when we are cast down, why it is so. Do we not have a God, and a Saviour who has risen from the dead? We do - so let us rejoice in him!

Acts 16:25-30

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 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. 27 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. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Here is one of the Bible's most famous passages. What Bible student has not heard of the Philippian jailer? What reader of God's word has not been struck by the glorious moment

himself? The words themselves can be understood in more than one way. In one way, they are perfectly real and true. But to a pagan, they might mean something else. The pagans believed in "salvation", but of a very different kind. It was a "salvation" from fate, and the control of evil powers. It was not the forgiveness of sins through an atonement being made. Just what the girl meant, is hard to definitely know. But after "many days" (verse 18), Paul had had enough. He spoke, and commanded the spirit to depart from the girl. He spoke with authority, as an apostle of Christ. He gave the commandment in Jesus' name, and it was a word which had immediate power. We do not know exactly what the onlookers then saw, but it was clear to her masters that the spirit really had left her (verse 19). Jesus had overcome the pagan powers. He had triumphed over evil at the cross. He was now resurrected as the Lord of all, with complete authority in heaven and earth. And now he was using that authority, to clear away darkness and Satan's legions, bringing liberty to those who were previously ensnared. This act was another illustration of the gospel's truth. As Christ healed crippled bodies (3:6, 14:10), and judged and blinded those who opposed his truth (13:11), he showed the reality of his risen power and total rule. He demonstrated that he reigned, and that Satan's power was taken from him. He declared that the darkness that covered the world could not stand against his kingdom's advance.

There are many deceivers today who claim to heal in Christ's name. Their works are quite unlike the apostles'. The apostles were immediate. They could be seen and confirmed by those who saw. There was nothing uncertain about them. Neither were the apostles' works done for show, or to make a name for themselves. It took some provocation before Paul was moved to this act (verse 18). We should not let these false teachers confuse us. The meaning of acts like these was to point to gospel truth. It was to testify that the gospel really does liberate us. This is something that ought to make us rejoice! No power can oppose the kingdom of our Lord Jesus. His rule will never be overcome, and will be without end. He shall reign, and every last one of his enemies shall be put under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25). Let us not be discouraged because the battle is fierce, and seems to go the wrong way. Christ is Lord, and he shall overcome.

We should note from Paul's actions that *God is only honoured when his work is done in his way*. There was a good deal of truth in the slave girl's words. The missionaries really were God's servants. They really were proclaiming salvation to the people. You might think that this testimony would help the gospel's progress. The girl's owners were obviously men of power and influence in the city. The girl herself was respected as a revealer of hidden things. But in fact her testimony did not honour the Lord at all. In the gospels, Christ always refused the endorsements of evil spirits (Mark 1:24-25, 1:34, 5:7-8). He was not looking for any praise, from wherever it came. He is never pleased with mere words from a wicked heart. His kingdom is not advanced this way. His name is honoured when he is honoured by his own people, who know him and love him.

In God's kingdom, the means do not justify the ends. The method used matters just as much as the result that comes out of it. If God is not honoured by the way we do things, then he is not honoured by the outcome either. Here is something we must be convinced of today. Churches everywhere are coming up with their own ways of spreading the gospel. Many of them have little to do with what Christ has laid down in Scripture. Often they pander to our own small ideas of God, and big ideas about ourselves. Regularly they do down preaching, and put something more entertaining in its place. We must be convinced

that this is not pleasing to our Lord.

Finally, let us remark that *many people oppose the gospel for completely foolish reasons*. There was nothing spiritual at all about what the slave owners did here. Even a moment's thought would show them that it made no sense. If they even slightly believed the girl's words, they ought to have listened to Paul and Silas. Having seen the greater power there was in Jesus' name, they should have thought twice before opposing it. If they in any way trusted the girl as an accurate revealer of hidden things, then surely they should have enquired about the "way of salvation" she had spoken of. But they did none of these things. When they saw that the spirit was gone, they were furious, because their chance of making money was gone too. They were not pleased for the girl at all. They were not glad that she was now released from her terrible possession. They did not stop for any of these things, but "seized" the missionaries and "dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities" (verse 19). They cared about money, and losing money made them mad.

Sadly, these men were not alone. Many take little time to listen to the gospel, or seriously question whether they need its truth. All they know is that the gospel threatens to make something or other less comfortable for them - and that is enough! Their ears become closed, and they will not seriously think about their sin, or their readiness to meet with God. They might sit through sermons every week. But their minds and hearts are already back at the office, counting their money. They might read the Bible and pray every day. But deep inside, they are only thinking about how to profit themselves in the things of this world. Is this not true? How else can we explain how there are so many sermons, and so little true godliness today? Let us ask ourselves, what our own motives really are. Do we love Jesus Christ, for his own sake? Is it his bleeding and dying at Calvary which moves our souls? Is it his love to us which is driving our desires and our deeds? God knows our hearts. We may fool ourselves, and we may fool everyone else - but we cannot fool him. Therefore, let us take care that our hearts are right with him.

Acts 16:20-25

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. 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

What has happened in Philippi has seemed quiet and slow to us so far. There has been no major confrontation with unbelieving Jews. There has been no public preaching in the synagogue. There have been only a small handful who have heard Paul speak at the riverside, and Lydia's household has believed. Now, though it all changes. The missionaries are dragged in front of the town's justices, and accused of great crimes.

We learn from these verse that *Satan is a great liar, full of wicked hatred towards Christ's gospel*. Here in Philippi, as in other places, he stirred up the crowds to oppose the apostles. He created a great deal of trouble, to prevent their message from being spread and heard. He whipped up a fierce persecution, to hurt and harm those who belonged to Jesus Christ. But this is not the climax of it. Notice just what he did on top of it all. He blamed Paul and Silas themselves for the trouble and tumult that resulted! He incited the slave owners to say that it was the apostles who were bringing trouble to the town, when they were doing no such thing. The missionaries were going quietly to a place of prayer, and had done a tremendously good deed on the way. They had harmed and hurt no-one. It was the slave owners who had seized innocent men; who had dragged peaceful visitors to a public place; who were causing a great stir by making all kinds of accusations.

Luke has shown us that Satan had tried the same kind of thing before. And he would try it again. It was a remarkably successful tactic! The Jewish leaders had murdered their own Messiah, crying out "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). And then they had accused the apostles of being wicked men, for preaching the very same thing! (Acts 5:28). Paul and Barnabas had fled from Iconium, because of the trouble which the unbelieving Jews had stirred up (14:2-5). And now the slave owners said that these Jews were causing great trouble - whilst causing it themselves! There was hardly a word of truth in their accusations. It was perfectly lawful for Romans to adopt the Jewish religion - we have already seen a centurion who did so (10:1). Paul and Silas, like many other Romans, were themselves Jews by birth. The missionaries were teaching repentance towards God, and faith in the promised Messiah. They taught that the reality of these things should be shown by a quiet and godly life of obedience and faithful service. If this was unlawful, then there must have been something very wrong with the law! But Satan is not troubled by such a "little" thing as truth. He has been a liar from the beginning. He is the father of lies, and of all liars (John 8:44).

We should not be shocked when the gospel is blamed for all kinds of evils. We should not lose heart because the truth is turned round one hundred and eighty degrees. When those who wish to oppose the Christian message cause trouble and then blame Christians for it, they are not doing something new. It has always been this way. We must rather be convinced that we must do what is right, whatever the results. We must never be found causing trouble for no good purpose. But if faithfulness to Christ brings trouble, then trouble there must be. If Satan's kingdom is troubled, that is no bad thing!

We should see from this episode that *injustice is an inevitable part of this fallen world*. Paul and Silas received very harsh justice. They were Roman citizens themselves (verse 37). To inflict punishment upon them without a trial, and to punish them openly, were both illegal. They had done no wrong, and were given no opportunity to defend themselves. Having come to Philippi only to do good to it, they were severely beaten (verse 22), and placed into the inner prison, fastened in stocks without even their wounds being washed (verses 24, 33). Those who had stirred up the trouble went on their way, having not even been questioned. No thanks was given to them for releasing the slave girl from her horrible condition. Instead, the whole multitude rose up against them, and the magistrates who should have protected them from injustice handed it out (verses 22-23).