



OCTOBER 3, 2021 | REV. DON MCISAAC

## “Transforming Encounters with Jesus” (Acts 16:11-40)

<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.

<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.

Before we begin why don't we again look to God in prayer.

**Father, this is Your word. You caused it to be written. You tell us in 2 Timothy 3:16 that it is breathed out by You. What a magnificent truth that every every law, every command, every word, every syllable is from You. We thank You for this passage we're about to read. Help us by Your Spirit to read, learn, and apply it, all for Jesus' sake.**

**Amen.**

Now let's hear the Word of God:

[Read Acts 16:11-40]

So, that we can get the full impact of this passage and what it tells us we need to first put it into the context of the story so far. The last verses of chapter 15 and the first verses of chapter 16 tell us about the events that led up to what has become known as Paul's “Second Missionary Journey.”

Barnabas took John Mark and set out for Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas to replace Barnabas, and passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches they had planted on their “First Missionary Journey. In chapter 16, we first read of Paul's meeting with Timothy in Lystra and his subsequent attachment to the ‘team’. This newly expanded team then continues on their journey and the task of delivering the decision from the leaders in Jerusalem that pastor Ron spoke about two Sundays ago.



We also should not fail to read this note of blessing in verse 5: **“The churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in number daily.”** We get a sense of how God is pouring out His Spirit on this young fledgling church, and the church is growing and expanding. This verse also affirms the main reason that the book of Acts was written.

Paul and his companions sought to preach the gospel in Asia, but they were **“forbidden by the Holy Spirit”** in verse 6. Next, they sought to go into Bithynia, but the **“Spirit of Jesus”** would not permit this either (verse 7).

So, God in His providence, prevented them from going in certain directions, and they head in the opposite direction. They travel down towards Troas, and it's there, in the middle of the night, that Paul sees this vision of a man from Macedonia who speaks to the Apostle Paul and says to him, **“Come over and help us.”** Now let's take a closer look at verse 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.”**

Paul has this vision, and he tells the rest of the team about it. And the word **“concluding”** in verse 10 seems to suggest that they had some sort of discussion. Maybe they asked questions of Paul, and also what they knew from God's Word. Maybe they did some risk assessment. They considered all the possibilities. Was Paul just suffering from indigestion because of what he'd eaten the night before? Was it maybe something like self-suggestion? Was it a true vision? Was it really from the Spirit? Maybe it was Satan? Was it a reasonable or an irrational thing?

It's always like this when we consider our direction in life. Many of us, we aren't told who to marry, or which property to buy, or where to live, or what career path to follow, or which university to attend, and so, we ask questions, and we consider everything we can think of before agonizing over the final decision. This is, I think, what Pastor Ron was alluding to a few weeks ago when he talked about the leadership of Young Nak & COAH using their God-given faculties of reason and experience to lead and guide this church into the future. Like Paul and his team, we push doors and see if they open, and if they don't open we think carefully and we conclude 'God must not want us to go in that direction.'

God was guiding Paul and his companions. He called them across the Aegean Sea to Europe, by some very unexpected means. And then, after landing at Troas, they walked quite a distance inland and they find themselves in Philippi.



And now we come to our passage.

In 1736, Jonathan Edwards wrote a book entitled “***A Narrative of Surprising Conversions***” about the great religious revival that had taken place in Massachusetts in the 1730’s. In it, he tells of some of the most amazing conversions of some of the most unlikely people, before focusing on two of them.

And that is what Luke is giving us here in this passage from the book of Acts that we just read. Luke paints a picture of two surprising encounters and the equally amazing conversions that come as a result. In this passage we see one woman and one man who were very far apart on the social spectrum. One was a prosperous businesswoman who sold purple cloth that only the very rich, like royalty, could afford. The other, a man, was someone who probably saw, first-hand, things that we only see on television or movies. He had probably seen the worst that humanity had to offer. Here was a man that many may have thought, because of the degradation that he was associated with, was beyond redemption. Here was a man that was hardened, he had seen it all, nothing could possibly shock him. But something would happen that evening that would shock him to his very core.

In this passage we find two different stories of two different people, but both come to the same saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, at this point in the sermon, many of you are asking what about the slave girl, the one who was possessed, she’s also in the narrative? Don’t forget about her. Wasn’t she saved as well? You might find it interesting, as I did, that there is absolutely no evidence in the passage here that this slave girl did trust in Jesus. We are not told whether she believed or not, even though we are clearly told that Lydia and the jailor did. There is no indication that she was baptized although Lydia and the jailor were (with their households). We are not even told if there was any attempt to show hospitality to the missionaries like Lydia and the jailor did. Yes, this girl was delivered from demon possession but, as far as the passage tells us, that is all.

Many commentators presume (rightly or wrongly) that what happened to others whom Jesus had cast demons out of also happened to her. That is, because of the healing/exorcism, they assume there would have been the desire to follow Him. But not everyone who Jesus healed wanted to follow him. Think about the ten Lepers in Luke 17: 1-17. Only one of them returned to praise God and fall at the feet of Jesus.

So, why did Luke include the account of the slave girl? I think for two reasons. First, was to show the exceedingly powerful authority of Jesus and second, to provide a segue way of sorts into the account of the jailor.



We may be surprised at where Paul and his team find themselves that first morning in Philippi. I think they probably were. God has called them away from where they had planned to go. And they can't even find a synagogue on the Sabbath Day. A synagogue was Paul's 'go to place' when he entered a new town or city. And what this means is that in the whole city of Philippi there was not even enough Jewish men to form a synagogue (custom says that it requires 10).

The team then has to travel a few kilometres outside of the city toward a river where they've heard there is a place of prayer. And when they get there, they find only a group of women. I'm not trying to be misogynistic here, but, in their patriarchal first century minds, there's not much there! Maybe they are thinking they took a wrong turn somewhere? Maybe some of the 'team' are starting to question the decision to come to Philippi. Has God really been leading them? After all their leader had received this extraordinary vision and so they were probably expecting something on a grander scale. But it's just a group of women.

However, Lydia is there. And now, God is going to do a wonderful thing. Lydia is going to be converted. Her heart is going to be opened; She is going to be drawn to embrace Jesus Christ as Paul now begins to preach the Gospel to them.

What we see here is an example of how God generally converts the souls of people who are far from Him. As the truth of Christ is revealed through the exposition of the Word, God opens people's hearts and draws them to Himself by the work of His sovereign Spirit. Here was a woman who, even though she was aware of what was being taught about God through the Jewish Scriptures, was still a Gentile after all. She was still far from God. But as she listened to Paul, and heard about Jesus of Nazareth, about His life, death, and resurrection. And about how he was the promised Messiah that she had heard so much about from the other women. Her heart is opened, and she accepts the things that Paul is teaching. Then we see the marks, the evidence of true conversion. First, she receives the Word, she acknowledges the truth about Jesus and then Second, she also opens her heart to those who are Jesus', to the missionaries, and asks them to stay at her house.

Do you know how important hospitality is in the book of Acts? Because Luke mentioned it twice in this passage alone and he has also experienced it time and time again. My family has also experienced many times this, for lack of a better word, Christian hospitality, when we have returned to Canada on furloughs. It's a very beautiful and confirming thing when brothers and sisters open their homes to you, despite the messiness of life. And sometimes this has not been just for a meal but for months at a time. It's confirming and encouraging because we know that many people do not have the means to help in a consistent way when we are on the field but, when they have the opportunity, they are more than willing to give what they do have. Hospitality for missionaries is yet another affirmation that the call to go and minister far from family and comfort is from God.



Lydia is now a believer, and she is of course baptized as a sign and seal of her justification and of her union with Christ. Her baptism serves as a sign and seal that her sins have been washed away. She's baptized out of obedience and her desire to follow the Lord. Her obedience to what is commanded would have been another confirmation to the missionaries of the genuineness of her conversion.

Now we come to the story of the of the young (probably teenaged) slave girl. It's a week later, maybe and Paul and his team are again heading to a meeting at the place of prayer. But, as they are walking along, they find themselves being followed by this young girl, a slave girl who has a spirit of divination. That means she is in double bondage. Not only is she a slave who owns nothing, but she is also in bondage to an evil spirit. This goes on for several days and each time she announces that **"These men are servants of the Most High God and have come to tell us the way of salvation."**

The first question we should ask of this account is, why does an evil spirit announce something that is true? Because it was true, they were servants of the Most High, and it was also true that they had come to tell the way of salvation. A Puritan preacher once made this very insightful comment that will help us put this into perspective. He said, ***"the devil will tell you a hundred things that are true in order that he might tell you the hundred-and-first thing that isn't true and weave his way of cunning and evil into (the machinations of) your heart and soul."*** That is why false teaching spreads so quickly amongst undiscerning Christians. There maybe some truth mixed throughout but it is that one falsehood that you unwittingly accept that will damn you for ever. This is why it is so important for believers to be involved in the study of His Word. Because only through being exposed to and knowing the truth can we be equipped to discern the lies.

The second question is related. Why did Paul wait so long to cast out the demon? Why, when the girl was basically affirming his ministry. The clue is found in the expression used by the evil spirit, **"the Most High God"**. Perhaps Paul was becoming concerned that this term, although technically true, could be misinterpreted by the polytheistic ears of the Philippians who believed in many gods. They could easily think that God was just one of several gods, even though, from the use of the expression **'Most High'**, He was thought of as the most important one. This interpretation could leave open the possibility that what Paul was proclaiming was just one way of salvation among many ways.

Or maybe, as the passage says, Paul just became irritated, fed up so to speak, (because that is what the Greek word translated as **'so troubled'** means) and it was time for him to cast out the demon. The evil spirit left her the instance Paul spoke, **"In the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her!"**

A great commotion arises because the slave girl's owners were losing their cash generator. Note that they were not astonished at the power exhibited over the evil spirit, but they were more upset at the loss of their income. Paul and Silas now find themselves stripped, beaten, and then imprisoned in the city of Philippi.



What follows is nothing short of amazing as once again we encounter the power of God to save those he has called. Here we also see the same confidence in God's sovereignty no matter what the circumstances, that was manifested in Peter's sleeping during his imprisonment. In verse 25 it is now shown here by Paul and Silas' singing and praising God while sitting in a jail cell. Their faith was so profound, so powerful, that even the other prisoners were listening to their praising.

The God provided earthquake serves to break the chains of not only the missionaries but also of every other prisoner. That fact alone causes the jailor to go through the preparations for suicide. The jailor prefers suicide over the prospect of shaming that a public execution would bring should his fears of mass escape be true.

Fortunately for the jailor, Paul shouts from within the prison, ***"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?"***

There is no more important question in all the world than that one. Of all the things that are on your mind today, of all the questions, of all the things that you are thinking about that you need to do tomorrow. You know that ever expanding "To Do" list that includes some things that you have been putting off for months. Those tasks have now become a burden and a concern to you and maybe even a source of strife in your relationships. Well, they pale into insignificance in comparison to this question: ***"What must I do to be saved?"***

The jailor wasn't asking how he will be saved from punishment from his superiors because remember none of the prisoners have escaped. No, this is purely a spiritual question and it's the profoundest question of all. Paul and Silas' answer is, ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*** The way of salvation, the way of rescue from sin, the way to be free from bondage to Satan is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The answer given was not, *"Be baptized."* Even though the jailor is baptized, that isn't the answer. Paul's answer was not *"Associate yourself with the church and be known as a Christian who does all the right things"* because that also is not the way of salvation. The answer that Paul gives, the way of salvation is ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."*** It's faith, and it's faith alone, in Christ alone. Faith is the abandonment of any hope that lies within yourself. Faith is the accepting that there is absolutely nothing that you can do, there is no work that you can accomplish, there is no resolve to be better that you can make, that will result in your true salvation. There is only faith.



It's all from the grace of God, and the only thing that I, you, we can do, and the only thing that this jailer can do is throw himself completely into the arms of Jesus Christ, who says to him, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"**.

Yes, we exercise faith. God doesn't believe for us. It is each individual's faith. It was the Philippian jailer's faith, but even that faith to believe was a God-given gift of the Holy Spirit. God was at work in drawing this man to Himself. In the case of Lydia, it was the preaching of the Word. In the case of this Philippian jailer, it was an earthquake that made him realize that at any moment he could be ushered into the presence of God. And that brings him to cry out, **"What must I do to be saved?"**

Now, as with Lydia, in the jailor we also see the evidence that a true work of conversion has taken place. There is the hospitality and kindness that he did not show previously that he now shows to the missionaries. He even washes their wounds! And, the most effective evidence that a true conversion has taken place, is the obedience the jailor shows when he is baptized to show that he has faith, that he has been adopted as a child of God, that he has received forgiveness of sins and now has the hope of glory. That's what baptism testifies to.

Then, also in verse 34 we read of another evidence, **"... he was filled with joy!"** There was now this joy that only those who know their sin is forgiven, that they have peace with God, and are kept by the power of God until the very end, can experience.

The answer for the Philippian Jailor is the same answer for us! Believe Jesus Christ with all your heart and all your soul and you will be saved.

So, there we have it, a prosperous woman in Lydia, and a man of the world in the Philippian jailer. Both from different social backgrounds with different characters and different temperaments and both are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ by the same way: by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

What do we learn from today's passage? We learn that the Gospel begins with God. It is not we who seek after God as it says in Romans 3:9-18 but it is God who seeks and saves us, opening our hearts to respond to the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf (see Acts 16:14). Salvation is not about the works that we do; salvation is about what the Lord Jesus Christ has done on the cross of Calvary. We are saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are sinners who deserve God's eternal wrath (hell). God sent Jesus to earth as the Promised Messiah, fulfilling the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. By believing on the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life, we are saved.



There is another immediate application for us as a church that I would like to mention in closing:

As Young Nak/COAH re-enters the world of missional living as the people of God, as the church, then today's passage serves to remind us of a few things that it would be best for us to keep in mind:

The wrapping may be different, but the gift is the same. What I mean by that is, the core, essential message of the gospel should never be altered to appeal to the culture around us. That has been the downfall of many denominations and individual churches. That is what our leaders our elders and pastors are charged with preventing.

The message for Lydia and the Jailor was the same. The same grace that saved a prosperous woman of great social standing, was the same grace that saved this hardened jailor. It's the same message, from the same Word. Grace operated in both their lives to bring them out of the bondage of sin and Satan and into the arms and embrace of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we must always remember that God is the one who draws people to Himself and saves them not our eloquent or convincing speeches, or our attractive programs.

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank You for the gospel, for free and sovereign grace. We thank you for the assurance that trusting in Jesus, in Jesus alone, in His completely effective sacrificial death, and the forsaking of everything else, will result in our salvation. We thank You for the joy that comes to those who do just that; the joy of forgiveness; the joy that we are now the adopted children of God and are being conformed into the likeness of Christ. Lord, I pray for anyone in this sanctuary and online today who has yet to ask the question, "**What must I do to be saved?**" and may they hear Your sweet words: "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.**" In Jesus name and for his glory.

Amen.