



Message #38

**“A WHOLE LOT OF SHAKING GOING ON”
(Acts 16:16-40)**

Paul and the team (Silas, Timothy and Luke) had travelled to Macedonia in response to a vision (Acts 16:6-10). This was the Lord’s leading and opening doors of opportunity for the gospel to be taken to a new continent (Europe).

God had some specific appointments for Paul and the team in Macedonia.

The first appointment was with Lydia (the first European convert) at the river on a Saturday (Sabbath) afternoon (Acts 16:11-15).

The rest of Acts 16 brings the other two appointments to the fore....

- A demon-possessed slave girl
- A jailer in charge of the Philippian prison

THE SLAVE GIRL

The team first encountered this slave girl as they were going back to the “place of prayer” by the river. This girl had a spirit/demon that gave her the power/ability to predict the future. This proved to be a lucrative business for her owners as 16:16 tells us that she earned a great deal of money (for her owners) through her fortune telling activities.

Luke reports that she followed Paul and the team shouting out at them. Interestingly, what she shouted was the truth, even though coming from an unlikely source..... *“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved!”*

This encounter is similar to one Jesus had with a demon-possessed man (Mark 1:24).

Apparently, this intrusive behaviour continued on for several days, to the point that Paul obviously felt that it was not helpful (they did not want to be associated with anything occultic).

So Paul, in the Name and authority of Jesus Christ, commanded the spirit to leave the girl...and it did.

Important note: Paul did not have the power to cast out demons....He commanded (not invite or ask) the spirit to depart from the girl in the name and authority of Jesus Christ. Power and authority over the spiritual forces of evil rests in Jesus Christ alone.

Have you ever had any first-hand experience of the reality of the (unseen) spiritual realm?

Do you think people take the occult and things to do with evil spirits and demons seriously?

What, do you think, are the dangers of even a casual flirtation with occultic activity (seances, tarot cards, Ouija boards, fortune telling etc)?

The evil spirit left the girl and she was healed, spiritually, by the power and authority of Jesus Christ. This should have been a point of rejoicing but, instead, it caused quite a controversy.

Read Acts 16:19-21. What do you think most disturbs the slave girl’s owners?

Christianity was perceived as a subversion of Roman culture (16:20-24). In what ways is Christianity perceived to be a threat to your society’s culture today?

There are many reasons that people reject the gospel. The owners of the slave girl resisted the gospel because of material gain. What are some reasons that you see today for rejecting the truth?

THE JAILER

Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. What was their response? (16:25)

How does your response to opposition and suffering compare and contrast to that of Paul & Silas?

Suddenly an earthquake shakes the prison and everyone's chains fall off. The jailer knows that if a prisoner escapes he will have to take the punishment they would have had. So, because some of the prisoners may have been on "death row", the jailer decides to kill himself as a way of escaping the humiliation and execution he would likely suffer.

But, in the gloom and chaos, Paul's voice calls out assuring the jailer that all the prisoners are still there.

Put yourself in the position of the jailer. What would you be thinking and feeling through all this?

Why do you think the jailer responded with a question: "What must I do to be saved?"?

If someone asked you that question, what would you say?

Luke's narrative says that both Lydia and the jailer's households were baptized with them. We can assume, safely I think, that, given Paul's clear understanding and proclamation of the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ, that the household members also came under conviction by the gospel and made their own personal response to it. I think it would be inconsistent to presume that they were baptized only because Lydia and the jailer believed. (There is no family ticket to heaven!)

The three individuals presented in Acts 16 are very different. Lydia was a wealthy businesswoman, the girl was a demon-possessed slave, and the jailer was a soldier or para-military/law enforcement officer. These three converts to Christianity become the foundation of the new church in Philippi....demonstrating the unifying power of the gospel.

Paul and Silas, after being released from prison (because it was unlawful for Roman citizens to be imprisoned without a trial etc) returned to Lydia's house and encouraged the young believers, before the team left Philippi.

PERSONALLY SPEAKING:

Paul's response to suffering drew the jailer to ask him about salvation.

In what way(s) are you walking through trials right now? Who might be watching how you handle them? How might they be the means of giving you opportunities to share the gospel?

Do you struggle to find joy, even in your times of trial and suffering?

When there is a whole lot of shaking going on in your life, what is your focus and attitude?

What can you personally learn from Paul & Silas and their choice to pray & praise God, even in prison?

PRAY

How does this passage encourage you to pray....for yourself and your trials, and for your church?