

## **“A Church Plant in Philippi”**

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Scriptural Foundation: Acts 16:1-40, ESV

We are beginning the series on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippian church. The letter begins in Acts 16 because this is when the church in Philippi was begun when it was planted. It was the first church in Europe. Prior to the events in Acts 16, the Gospel had not been taken to Europe.

In this study we will be discussing about God building His church today and we see that in action in Acts 16. Acts 16 is all about the Gospel. We are catching up to the Apostle Paul's Second Missionary Journey and he is with Silas to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world.

### **The Macedonian Call**

<sup>6</sup> And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup> And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. <sup>8</sup> So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” <sup>10</sup> 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.

### **The Conversion of Lydia**

<sup>11</sup> So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. <sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. <sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

### **Paul and Silas in Prison**

<sup>16</sup> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup> And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

<sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. <sup>20</sup> And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. <sup>21</sup> They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

### **The Philippian Jailer Converted**

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup> and 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 bonds were unfastened.

<sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." <sup>29</sup> And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

God designed, builds, and owns His church. He is the Architect, Builder, and the Title-Holder of the church. Jesus, in His preaching in Matthew 16, said,

<sup>18</sup> "... *I will build my church...*"

The church was not founded like other organizations such as the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, or even Bible study fellowship. These organizations were begun when a person, an individual, saw a need and decided to do something about that need. They, then, organized some others around them to address that need, but not the church. The apostles did not gather together as a group, after Jesus died and say, "We should try to continue meeting together. Maybe we should do some work together for God and for Jesus' name. We should start a new society."

No, that is not how the church began. Peter and the other apostles were given instructions by God to wait and to pray for the promised Holy Spirit to come. For Peter and the disciples, their part in starting the church was simply one of following Divine Orders. They simply waited and they obeyed. They were merely instruments in God's hands. They were not founders of the church. There is only one Founder and that is God.

When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, God divinely added three thousand souls to the number of the church. From that point the record of Acts is one of the Holy Spirit's work of planting churches and growing churches to become what God designed sovereignly to be. But, the church did not begin, nor did it grow, as a result of human effort. It began and it grew as a result of God's sovereign working.

The principle we learn from the Book of Acts, and elsewhere in the New Testament, is God Himself designed, builds, and owns the church. Let this truth sink deeply into your life. Let it ruminate in your soul. I believe if this truth sinks into our heart, our life will be changed. How will this truth, the fact that God designed, builds, and grows churches, be life-changing and how would that make a practical difference in my day-to-day living?"

I want to offer four life-altering applications. First, if this truth sank into our soul, we would love the church to the point we would gladly give our life for her. Jesus loved the church so much, Ephesians 5:2 tells us He loved the church so much He gave Himself up for her. To be like Jesus means we would commit our very life for the advance of the holiness and the mission of the church.

Secondly, if this truth sank deep into our soul, we would see participation in Jesus' church as the most honorable and most valued association of our life. We would say, "This is number one in reference to my commitments." We would not consider the church an obligation to bear, but a joyful gift to receive. God has placed us in His church and in His work.

Third, if this truth sank deep into our soul, we would be patient with the local church in her many problems and failings. We would see we are a part of those problems and not outside of them. We would not criticize the local church with an outsider's contempt, but we with an insider's sorrow and with an willingness to work for change.

Finally, if this truth sank deep into our soul, we would daily seek for ways to love others within Christ's church and to help them connect to the church both in relationship and mission. This would be a part of how we relate to others in the Body of Christ. We would come on Sunday morning with a view as to how we can encourage others to connect in relationship and in mission to the local church.

In joy, Jesus Christ declared, "I will build my church." How fun it is to be a part of that, to be a part of something Christ Himself is doing.

The question May be asked, “What does God specifically do to build His church?” We will be studying the birth of the church in the city of Philippi to answer that question. This message is an introduction to the letter we plan to study. The Apostle Paul begins his letter to the Philippian church this way,

<sup>1:1</sup> Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons...<sup>1</sup>

Paul is writing to a church and he identifies that church as “all the saints”, but he makes special mention of the official leaders of that church, the “overseers and deacons” of that one church in Philippi.

How did the Gospel come to these people located in a Roman city on the continent of Europe approximately nine hundred and thirty-five miles away from Jerusalem where Christianity was born? Who was this church planted just seventeen years after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus? God sovereignly worked to plant local churches and to build His church.

There are four actions this story helps us to understand regarding God’s working to plant and build His church. First, **God leads His church**. Is it not wonderful to know we have a personal God who personally leads His church for the purpose of building it?

In the verses of Acts 16 we did not read, Paul joins Paul and Timothy together in the city of Lystra. The following map will help us to get some bearings.



Paul begins his journey in Israel and the white line indicates his Second Missionary Journey. He leaves from Jerusalem, moves north and then moves westward. He will reach the city of Lystra, where he joins with Timothy. Timothy is unique because his mother is a Christian, or a Messianic Jew. His father is a Gentile. This makes Timothy particularly well equipped for mission work because he understands both the Jew and the Gentile customs and peoples. As Verse 6 tells us, they passed through “the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.”

Paul wants to go south into Asia. How did the Holy Spirit forbid him to go to Asia? That we do not know. Later in the journey, they want to go north into Bithynia and what happened,

<sup>7</sup> And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. <sup>8</sup> So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

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<sup>1</sup> New American Standard Bible (NASB)

The Holy Spirit was forbidding them to go to the south and to the north. The Holy Spirit was funneling them in a westerly direction to come to Troas on the western tip of the Asia Minor Continent.

.<sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

This is the beginning of the work of God in Europe. The principle we learn is: God takes interest in the details of planning and growing local churches. Paul wanted to go south during his journey and was not allowed. He wanted to go north during his journey and he was not allowed, but He keeps funneling Paul until he receives very specific instructions, "Come to Macedonia."

Interestingly, God is leading the leaders of His church, in Acts 16, first, by their simple heart-commitment of faith. Paul is not waiting in Jerusalem for a specific word about a specific town, but he says, "God wants me to spread the Gospel," and he is making use of the sanctified mind God has given to him. But, periodically, as Paul is using his sanctified mind God has given to him as he reads scripture which says, "Go into all the world and make disciples," Paul commits to being obedient to that. But, as he is moving, the Holy Spirit directs Paul away from the south and away from the north to a specific spot. Not every city was given specific directions as it is in Macedonia.

From Macedonia, God understood Paul's natural bent would not be to cross the Aegean Sea, but to stay put in this little continent of Asia, so God told him, "I want you to cross into Macedonia." The whole idea is God loves to lead His church for the purposes of His glory. He gives to the Apostle Paul, first, a great commission. He sets him aside for the work of going to the Gentiles. And, He gives specific instructions as He sees fit in the inner workings of the Apostle Paul's ministry in order to accomplish what Jesus said He was going to do, "I will build my church."

We believe God is still very interested in the details of planting and growing churches. We pray and Paul prayed. We study Scripture and Paul studied Scripture. We use biblical thinking to inform our decisions and we are sensitive to God's specific instruction as God sees fit to give them to us. We have no expectations He would show Himself in a vision or dream, but if He does we will say, "Okay, God, we are going to test this by Scripture and we will follow you wherever you will lead us."

I am so thankful to be a part of Bethany Baptist Church and for the obedient church God has used to build His church. Back in the late 1990's, the Bethany leadership committed themselves to searching Scripture to discern God's direction for us. I believe this is where any good thing begins, the searching of God's revealed will through the Bible. As we read we became very convinced of the conviction God was interested in planting churches. Our mission at that time was, "Win, Build, Equip." We were thinking very individually that winning individuals, building individuals, and equipping individuals was our purpose, but we thought, "Why would God's mission only be to individuals when we see throughout the New Testament it is about the church?"

God clearly called us, as I believe He does for every local church, to be involved in the work of planting other churches. We began discussing and praying over this and the possibilities in our local community. There were three specific locations which came to us which seemed good to us as we were considering what places might best benefit from a local church. As we were doing that, we were still not in agreement as to where that would be, but we were praying in a Wednesday night prayer meeting. A man, a pastor, came up to me afterwards and introduced himself as a pastor from a church in Bartonville, Illinois.

He told me, "Our church is dying and we are considering what we are going to do with the property. I have just heard you pray and God about church planting. Would you be interested in planting a church in Bartonville?" That was one of the places we had been praying over. It became very apparent the Lord is beginning to lead us.

We met with that group of people and we told them we did not want to take their property from them, but if they wanted to give that property to us we believe God would eventually have us plant a church. We were not ready to plant a church yet, and we had never done this before. We did not have a person to lead that church plant. The people were lead by God to give this building and property to a church they had no prior connection with whatsoever. Then we began to pray over who God is going to have help us to start and lead this church. We began searching and interviewed three in particular who were very qualified and in whom we were interested.

During this time Art Georges was attending The Master's Seminary and he asked if it would be possible for us to wait until he graduated from The Master's Seminary and let him be used to plant the church. We believed, at that time, the Lord wanted us to move forward much more quickly than that. But, one by one, as we continued to work with individuals, they withdrew their name. We did not know why and why the Lord was delaying this.

We got to the time Art Georges graduated. We believed this was God's provision for us. He came and began the work of planting that church. Ten years ago, that church in Bartonville launched with about thirty families from Bethany Baptist Church. If you go there today, on a Sunday morning, and I encourage you to do so, I believe you will rejoice that this is what God does.

I tell you that story because I want you to see, while we believe God leads us through His Word and the intelligence and thought-life God gives to us as we reflect upon His Word and in prayer, He also does some extraordinary things to build His church. He surprises us over and over again by giving to us very specific encouragement to help to move us in a very specific direction! Over and over, again, in that process we were surprised. That same could be said of the next church plant in Washington, Illinois. None of us had a Bartonvillian vision of a man saying, "Come help us," but we believe, nonetheless, God was directly involved in that.

I encourage you, today, to continue to pray for us. We continue to consider planting churches. We believe the Lord has led us to consider planting a church in the Bradley University area. We have thought biblically about our community and we believe the Holy Spirit is directing us to that area. It is not a heavy growth-cell area and it is not an area church planting gurus, necessarily, would say, "That is an area you need to plant," but we believe that a place in our community that enables us to plant a church that is expositional in ministry, teaching Scripture centered on the Gospel, where students can walk and families and individuals living in that area can find a church home without having to drive out of their neighborhoods in order to become a part of a church.

We believe it is positioned in a way that would allow the Bethany Fellowship of Churches<sup>2</sup> to have a close contact with the inner city, the hardships there, and a ministry that could go on there. Pray for us as we identify the right person. We believe we are fairly close to that decision. We are seeking the Holy Spirit's confirmation through prayer and meeting with interested people. If you are interested, we would love to have you be a part of that group. And, we are meeting with leaders within the BFC. Aren't you thankful for God's interest in the direction of the ministry of His church?

Let me make some applications. First, pray for your church leaders to know and do the will of God, to be led by God's Spirit and not by the human interest or fears. Second, encourage your church leaders through your prayers, love, partnership, and support. We are all in this together.

I love Verse 10,

<sup>10</sup> 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.

God used these means to confirm His will and they said they would commit themselves to this. As an aside, as we study this text, in Verse 7, the writer, Luke, says, "...they were forbidden..." But, Verse 10 says, "...we sought to go into Macedonia..." This is the place where Luke joins the team and he goes into Philippi with Paul and Timothy.

In the second application, listen to God's voice in instructing you regarding your part in God's church. I would ask you to go home, search Scripture, and continue to pray saying, "Lord, how would you have me to join your work of building your church?" If you are a believer, there is something specific to which God would answer regarding that question. If you do not know the answer, seek Him, do what Paul did, get moving and obey the Great Commission and what you know to be true on the basis of specific Scripture and trust God would lead you very specifically as you walk along that path of commitment and obedience.

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<sup>2</sup> Bethany Fellowship of Churches (BFC): Bethany Baptist Church, Edwards, Illinois; Living Hope Community Church, Bartonville, Illinois; Bethany Community Church, Washington, Illinois.



The second way God builds His church is: **God populates His church,**

<sup>11</sup> So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,

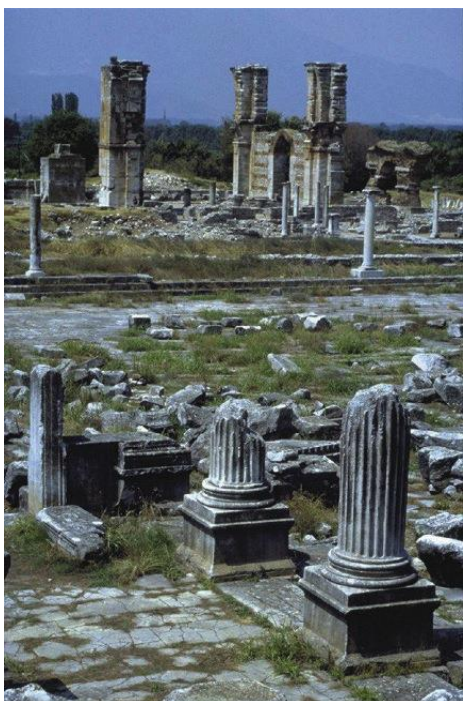
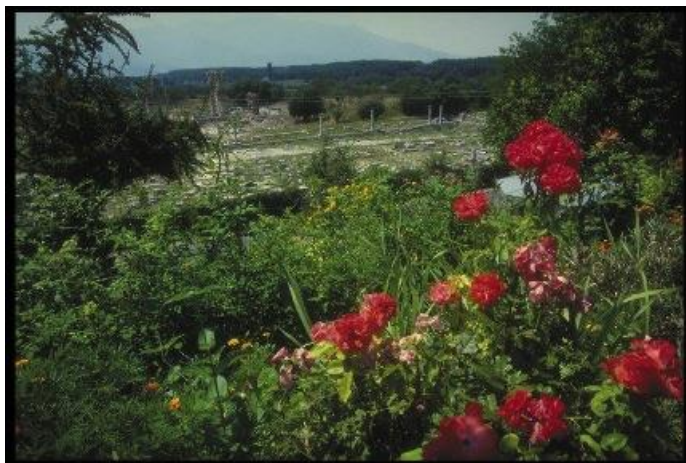
<sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

It is an approximately one hundred and fifty mile trek by boat on the Aegean Sea. It takes about two or three days. Once they landed at Neapolis, they had about a ten mile walk to Philippi. Philippi gets its name from Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedon. This is a centuries old city by the time Paul enters it. It is a Roman colony and a place where many Roman soldiers and officers went to retire. It was a nice place and it was a place where Rome did not demand the payment of taxes if one lived there, and everyone who is retired looks for a place where there is a low tax base.

Paul is looking for a synagogue,

<sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

Here are some pictures of Philippi:



The top photo is overlooking Philippi as it is today and the lower left photo is of the ruins which are Philippi today. The lower right photo is a diagram of the main street. It is not a huge town, but this is an outlay of what Philippi looked like in Paul's day. There are a number of temples in Philippi because this is a Roman city that engaged in emperor worship and in the worship of the Greek pantheon. Apollo was one of the big gods who had a big temple not too far from Philippi.

Think of yourself being the Apostle Paul and you get this vision of a Macedonian saying, "Come, help us!" and you travel hundreds of miles because you believe God has something big. You travel by boat and when you land there is no landing party. You travel ten miles inland to Philippi and you expect some big crowd God has assembled just waiting to hear you preach the Gospel. But, there is nobody!

In order for a city to have a Jewish synagogue, in which Paul typically began his ministry whenever he entered a foreign city, there needed to be ten Jewish men. Evidently, there were not enough people to meet the requirements of a synagogue. Instead, he goes to a riverside where he hears there are some God-fearing people praying, which turns out to be a group of women, and he begins to talk to them.

Think of the possible emotional letdown of that. "Come, help us," and there is nobody there. "Who am I supposed to help?" "There are some women praying at the river." "Okay, I will talk with them." The Apostle Paul was of a faith richer than mine. He was not discouraged, instead he was very encouraged because he had someone to talk with and he knew God's Kingdom began like a little mustard seed. It begins so very small and it grows into a big tree.

Lydia was a seller of purple. The following photo shows the shellfish from which this purple dye is made.



Lydia is of ironic origin. She was from the city of Thyatira. That is in Asia where Paul was told not to go. The first person Paul talks to in Philippi is a person from Asia. God sent Lydia from her hometown so she would meet Paul and Paul would meet her and the Gospel would be proclaimed. Lydia becomes the first convert on the European continent.

The principle we learn from this is: God's work of salvation is always a miracle of God's sovereign grace opening a heart that is closed to the Gospel. The text tells us,

<sup>14b</sup> The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Lydia's conversion is a model for every conversion. A conversion to Christ is always the sovereign work of God in opening a heart closed to Him.

Lydia is a God-fearer. From a human standpoint, she was most likely to believe the Gospel. Yet, it is interesting, as Luke writes this account, he says of Lydia, "God opened her heart." Luke wants to point out that religious, law abiding, prayer devoted Lydia needed God to open her heart or her heart would remain forever closed to Him. If that is true of Lydia, a person whom we would say was most likely to open their own heart to God, then it is true of every one of us. And, the Bible teaches that, indeed, is true. God's work of salvation is always a miracle of His sovereign grace opening a heart that is closed.

The text does not tell us that Paul, through his convincing words, opened her heart. The text does not tell us Lydia, because she was personally ripe and sensitive to God and His truth, opened her heart. That is not what happened. An unregenerate person does not populate God's church according to his or her own will. Only God can bring members into His church.

Who moves people to receive the Gospel so they would receive eternal life? God does. Indeed, God uses individuals like Paul, but God is the One who sovereignly imparts the salvation from the first flutter of one's heart toward Him. God is the One who convicts us of our sin. God is the One who enlightens our dark mind. God is the One who opens our closed heart. God is the One who grants faith to an unbelieving soul. God is the One who gives life to those who are dead in their trespasses and sins. God is the One who keeps a redeemed soul from falling back into sin and condemnation.

The Apostle Paul will write in his letter to the church in Philippi,

<sup>6</sup> For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul would say,

<sup>9:15</sup> "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." <sup>16</sup> So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

John would write the same, as he said,

<sup>John 1:12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

I love this description of God opening Lydia's heart. Has God opened your heart to commit your life to Christ and receive the new life found in Him? Populating a local church is God's specific interest. Jesus said, "I will build my church!" How does God build His church. He does it one heart at a time. Is that not a wonder and an awesome truth.

Conversion is possible only by the power of God's Spirit. It is always, always a miracle. The application to draw is to pray for God's Spirit to work through you, first, so as to open God's Word to your heart because our heart is closed and hardened. It is deceitful above all else.<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel would say they are "stony."<sup>4</sup> I ask God's Spirit to work to open your heart, but also to use you to proclaim God's Word so other's hearts would be opened. Never become discouraged that someone heart is too hard and unable to receive the benefit of the Gospel. God is the One who miraculously opens hearts. He did so for Lydia and He will continue to do so until the time His Son Jesus comes in power and in glory.

If God opens our heart, then our heart becomes open to Him and our life is made complete. That is what happened to Lydia,

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 17:9

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 36:26



<sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

When God opens a heart He changes the entire person. Lydia became a person who said, “I am all about joining up with God in His work of building the church. My home is yours. I want my home to be used 24/7 for the sake of Your work in building Your church.”

**Third, we read of the servant girl who is demon-possessed.** She illustrates for us **how God empowers His church,**

<sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

The demon inside of her was doing that in order to provide a distraction from the Gospel message Paul was teaching and he became annoyed. He was not annoyed at the girl, but he was annoyed at the demon’s working in this poor girl who was oppressed, and he said,

<sup>18b</sup> “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

Please note the power of Christ to set those who are held captive by Satan to be absolutely free. She became free that day. But, observe the work of God in building His church will be opposed. We cannot expect the work of God in building His church will carry on in some calm, smooth, on-going, gentle flow, but we can expect opposition from the evil one and that opposition will come in all forms. Sometimes it will come through specific demonic attacks as it was in the text. At other times it will work within the church to build division and strife. Even that was happening in this church in Philippi some twelve years later when Paul would a letter to them.

Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.” In other words, there will be strong opposition, but He is stronger than the enemy and those who oppose Him. We are to be encouraged. There are three applications regarding God empowering His church to be overcoming the opposition that faces us. First, be ready for battle. The work of the Gospel always invites hostility. Second, we are to be confident, “Know that greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”<sup>5</sup> Third, be careful. Do not become unwitting pawns in the enemy’s hands to discourage God’s church.

So much, I believe, the discouragement in God’s church often does come not from the demonically possessed but from those who are inside the church and who are well-intentioned. Be ready, be confident, and be careful.

Finally, **God gives joy to His church.** The masters of this little girl see the demon is no longer in the girl and she cannot do her work of divination, and they have lost the means by which they could financially gain from her. That is all she was. They did not care about her whatsoever and they became enraged. In the text we read of how they whipped up the leaders in the city of Philippi to the point they dragged Paul and Silas out into the street and they beat them with rods, “and they inflicted many blows upon them.”

This is Luke the doctor speaking. He is speaking in a language so we will not be grossed by it. When Luke writes that a Roman group of soldiers inflicts many blows, understand it is many blows and it is a grotesque sight. They did not care at that point whether or not the ones being beaten would live or die,

<sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The next two pictures are of a prison in Philippi, which is still there, and of the inner chamber. It is dark and not lovely whatsoever. They are in stocks, in maximum security, and they are uncared for. They are bruised, beaten, and bloodied.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:4



The account tells us,

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them...

Think of yourself in Paul's and Silas's shoes. You have been obedient to God. You have traveled the world over. You have suffered many hardships. You come to the place God told you to go and what happens – you get beaten with many blows, thrown into a dark cell, and you do not believe you will ever see the light of day ever again. It would be easy to say, “God, what are you doing? I am obedient. I thought things were supposed to go better than this when I am obedient to you.”

The nature of the growth of Christ's church is one of suffering, yet we see Paul and Silas as an example that the joy of God in the heart of a believer transcends our circumstances. It transcends oppression. It transcends difficulty. It transcends pain and misery. It reaches out to us even in our darkest moment. Here we read of Paul and Silas singing praises to God.

When I was younger and listened to this story, I had this vision that Paul and Silas were kind of giddy as they sang their songs. But, I do not believe that is the way it was. They were real people. There was real pain. There were real problems. There was real suffering. I do not believe they were giddy, but I believe they said, “God is sovereign and He has a plan in this. We are aching, but let us sing in faith and in knowing God is the One who give us joy, this deep satisfaction even in the midst of great trial, pain, and misery.” Nehemiah would say, “...the joy of the LORD is your strength.”<sup>6</sup>

Our joy does not depend upon our circumstances or upon the acceptance by others, but it depends upon God's unfaithful love for us. The application I urge you to make is: pursue joy. Chase after joy in God as you would a treasure. If you find it do not loose it; hold onto it. It will be your greatest possession.

Eleven years later, from this incident, the Apostle Paul will be writing from another prison cell in Rome. He has not been beaten as in Philippi, but he is miserable, from a human standpoint. He is in prison. It is ugly and it is a hard time in his life.

At this time he has an even greater hardship. Not only is he in prison when he writes the letter to the Philippians, but he is being criticized by people in the church. Others want to take his place and they see this as an opportunity to take his place as a leader away and take his place as the leader. They are preaching Christ and they are preaching a good message, but they are doing so out of self-glory and self-promotion. He is being slandered and he is abandoned and almost all-forgotten by almost everyone in the church. Think of that, after he has served the church for eleven years.

It is so bad, in his second letter to Timothy, when Onesiphorus went to minister to Paul in Rome, no one could tell Onesiphorus where Paul was and he had to search for him. Imagine going to the believers and asking, “Where is Paul?” and they reply, “We do not know. We heard he is somewhere in some prison,” and how discouraging that would be that the church did not care enough for Paul personally to know exactly where he was at the time of his great need. That is Paul's condition when he writes his first letter to the Philippian church,

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<sup>6</sup> Nehemiah 8:10b

<sup>1:18</sup> What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, <sup>20</sup> as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul is not going to be bothered by people who proclaim Christ out of their own selfishness and their desire for self-glory. He only cares that Christ is proclaimed. In his closing remarks to the Philippian church as he is in prison in Rome, Paul writes,

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Paul understood what it means for a believer to pursue joy and he knows God gives it in the darkest times. We are to rejoice because this is how God builds His church.

The Philippian jailer becomes afraid when this earthquake comes. He believes all of his prisoners had fled. He is about ready to fall on his sword because he does not want to fall into the hands of his Roman superiors, whom he knows would execute him in a very brutal way for not fulfilling his duty. Paul cries out to him, “Do not fall on your sword! We are all here! We have not fled!”

They jailer gets a torch for light and comes into the cell to find everyone there. He takes the two prisoners, whom he has heard all night singing praises to God, even in the midst of their abysmal condition, and he asks one question,

<sup>30b</sup> “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” <sup>31</sup> And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

God loves to do the work of populating His church by opening hearts in miraculous ways: in a woman who was a God-fearing worshipper but who did not know Christ, religious but lost; in a little girl who was demon possessed and completely bound up in her will by Satan; in this hardened jailer who wanted nothing to do with Christ whatsoever until God opened his heart.

Has God opened your heart? If so, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. What a great truth it is that Christ has said, “I will build my church.” How great it is to be a part of that.