

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Scripture Reading: **Acts 16**

Sermon: **The Spectrum**

There is a top ten list of voyages by ships that have changed the world. On that list, of course, is Magellan, who was the first man to sail around the world and to prove that the world was round; Christopher Columbus, who was trying to find a new free route to India and instead found the New World; and the Mayflower that brought the first people here to the United States. Not on that list is a sea voyage recorded in the 16th chapter of Acts. It is really just four men who were in what is now the country of Turkey who were missionaries. They really planned to go north. They really planned to turn towards the Soviet Union. But they said God stopped them twice. Then in the middle of the night they had a vision in which there was a man standing in Greece who said come over this direction. So the sea voyage is simply four missionaries leaving Turkey going across the Aegean Sea and landing in Greece. When you stop to think that that was the beginning of the Christian movement in Europe and when you stop to think of what Christianity has meant to Europe and what Europe has meant to the world, then probably you think as I do that this little sea voyage really ought to be on the top 10 lists of things that have changed the world.

When they landed in Greece, they went to the biggest city, Philippi, and in the 16th chapter of Acts is the story of the first three people who gave themselves to Jesus Christ in Europe. They are remarkable stories. Let me read a portion of it today. Begin reading down in verse 13.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river where we expected to find a place for prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who were gathered there. One of them listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 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.

The second story begins in verse 16:

Once we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl 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." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled 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.

Now when these religious pimps recognized that they were getting ready to lose lots of money, they caused a mob scene, and Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown into prison. Out of that background we come to the third story of the person who is going to come to know Christ. Let me begin reading at verse 25.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's changes came loose. 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. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here." The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Now he was thinking about physical life, but they turned immediately and began talking about spiritual life. They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--and your household." Three people came to belief in Christ. One of them was a successful business woman. She was devote. One of them was a non-entity, a slave person. She was disturbed. One was a middle-class Roman businessman, a jailer. He was distressed. In those stories we come to recognize that probably one of them describes somebody in this audience today.

The first person who came to faith in Christ was a very successful woman. The Bible says that she dealt in purple cloth, which meant that she was very, very rich. In Jewish history any time that a Jew would go to a different part of the country, if ten men were there, they would form a synagogue. These Jewish women were down praying by the river, which meant there were not even ten Jewish men there, but some of the women got together and they would pray every day. Paul learned about it, so he went first there. It is absolutely remarkable in the history of Christianity how sensitive the spirits of women have been to Jesus. Everywhere that you have read how Christ has touched people's lives almost at the forefront everytime there are women, women who somehow seem to respond to what Jesus says and they listen, and recognize that He is telling the truth. It is amazing also how many of these business women have become very successful and have also given great sums of money to the cause of Christ. Many of you women in our audience today have used Mary Kay Cosmetics. Perhaps you are aware that one of the greatest contributors to the cause of Christ in the United States is Mary Kay. Some of you have gone out to our Missionary Learning Center which is about 25 miles away. Some of you who know the history of that are aware that there was a successful business woman who had a great deal of money who gave millions of dollars to help to see that that facility was built. Through the years it has been women who have responded and women who have given much of their resources to help the cause of Christ. It is interesting to me that when Paul came and began to tell the story of Christ, it says it this way. "The Lord opened her heart." What that simply means is if you are here, if you are open to God, if you have a desire to want to serve Him, if you want to know His truths, then what God does is He gives His power to work in your life, and just opens your heart, and you have the opportunity to understand about Him. Many times we want to reverse the process. The process is this. God always says if you give e yourself to me, then I will tell you the truth and I will prove myself to you. What we want to do is to reverse it. We want to put God on trial. What we want to say to God is, "God, if you will prove yourself to me, then I'll give myself to you." And God says, "No. It doesn't work that

way.” I just need to remind you air does not need you to breathe. God doesn’t need you to try to prove who He is. What God is trying to say is all right--let’s prove who you are. Are you willing to be honest with me? Are you willing to be open to me? Are you willing to give your life to me? And if you are willing, then I will prove myself to you, and I will demonstrate my power to you.

If you have never marked in your Bible, let me ask you just to mark it because it helps us to understand this whole process. It is John Chapter 7, verse 17. People came to Jesus, and they said, Jesus, we don’t know whether you are telling the truth or not. So many people come. There are so many answers in so many ways. Are you telling the truth are not? Jesus in John 7: 17, says it this way. *“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my will is from God.”* Now, notice the process. If the will is ready, the mind will be satisfied. If you are willing to do my will, then you will know my will. The issue always is issue of my own heart. Because Lydia was a person with a heart open to God, when the message came she responded. Everytime I read this story I am reminded afresh of the power of the message of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we in the west I almost think come to church. Try to handle TNT and throw it up and down as though there is not much to it. But when you begin to hear stories of people who hear Jesus for the first time, you are amazed at the power that Jesus has to transform lives.

In the mountain region between Mozambique and Zimbabwe, there is a missionary couple named the Clareys. They are in the process of doing what missionaries are doing all around the world; that is, they are showing a film called the “Jesus Film” produced here in the United States. It simply just takes the book of Luke, and in a chronological, historical way tells who Jesus is. Missionaries around the world are going with their generators and going out in these villages around the world, setting up screens, and showing this film. The Clareys in the mountain region was showing it. The chief was there. The chief of the whole tribe. After it was over, he invited the Clareys into their home and said I would like for you to tell me more. That night they sat down for over an hour and explained to him more about Jesus. After a few moments he said enough. He walks out of his little hut, turns to all of the people around the fire and says I want you to know that I have given my life to Jesus Christ. I want you to also do the same. He was absolutely amazed about what he had heard. I have become convinced particularly in the United States that people turn down Jesus, not because they have examined Jesus, not because they understand Jesus. They have turned down a character toward Jesus--some Jesus that they have made up in their mind. Once you ever understand who He is and what He said and what He has done, I am convinced that almost everybody will then want to give their life to Him. Here was this rich, open, warm women who heard the message, and said that’s it! This is the truth. Her life was changed, and her whole household.

There is a second story. It is the story that you go to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. You go from a rich business woman to a non-entity. You go to a slave woman, doesn’t even have a name. Doesn’t have anything. But she is, the Bible says, possessed by a devil. People often ask is it possible to be possessed by a devil? Let me say to you that all of us are distressed by the devil. Some people become oppressed by the devil. But, yes, it is possible to become possessed by a devil. If you have ever been in certain parts of the world and seen some of the gosh awful stuff that people babble in, you would not be surprised at what I am saying. There are many dark alleys that people walk down that open the door to where they are no longer in charge of their life but some other power is in charge of their life. The Bible says that she had the ability to tell the future. Let me just say to you. You can almost tell immediately what spirit is in a person. When a person is close to God, they have the broad strokes of the future. Jesus told us the temple was going to be destroyed, wars shall continue, the Son of Man shall come.

We kind of know how the world is going to end. But when you see a spirit that turns and says I want to tell you the details of your life, I want to tell you what is going to happen to you tomorrow, I want to tell you who you are going to marry, I want to tell you where the lost ring is. If you will call Psyche 11, if you will look into a bowl, if you will look at tea leaves, if you will let me read your palms, I can tell you the future. You don't have to guess what spirit that is. Jesus taught us you do not know what tomorrow brings. That is the reason you need day or day to trust in Him. I don't know why I don't know what the next 24 hours will bring. I only know that I am shut up in time, alone with God to trust and depend in Him. This lady had all of the powers of evil in her life, but she comes running along one day. Listen to what she says. These men are the servants of the most high, and they have come to tell you about the Lord Jesus. I thought Paul would get all excited. But he didn't. He became disturbed. If your watch is broken, it will be right twice a day. But you don't want to build your schedule around it. The devil sometimes tells the truth, but he tells you the truth so he can manipulate you. He may tell you the truth twice a day, but don't build your life around it. Paul understand nothing is worse than the devil trying to tell the truth. So he turned to her in the power of God, and spoke against that evil spirit, and said you have possessed her long enough. I now command you to come out, and the lady became free. There are people in this room, started out by saying I want to be in charge of my life. Now something else is in charge of you. You started off in what you thought was harmless fun. Now you are aware that you literally are not in charge of your own schedule. I want to come to tell you that just as Lydia, the successful business person with an open heart, was open to God and her life was changed, there is a power available unto you that can change and transform your life, and can let you again be in charge of yourself.

There is a third story. They are thrown into prison, beaten with whips, feet in stocks. It is midnight. The Roman jailer by Roman law is responsible for the people who are in jail. It is an eye for an eye, it is life for a life. If a life gets out, the jailer dies. He makes sure that everybody is safe. He goes home. He goes to bed, and then all of a sudden it is No. 6 on the Richter scale, and the whole place is shaking. The Roman jailer comes running back down. He thought everybody was gone. But sitting in the prison are Paul and Silas. Since midnight they have been praising God and singing. A remarkable thing happened. Everybody is still there. The jailer is so impressed. He falls down on his knees before the people. There is a play on words. The word is translated in our English: sirs, what must I do to be saved? The word "sirs" is kurios. Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They turn it around. They said I can tell you how to be saved, eternally saved. It is not we kurios. It is him kurios. He is the Lord. Turn your faith and your trust in Him.

Some of you in this room today are like a Roman jailer. You have worked hard, gotten ahead, thought everything was under your control. I mean you had it all locked in stocks. You had gone home and gone to bed. But you have had an earthquake in your life. And everything you thought was secure, is not secure. You thought everything was under control, and you realize the prison doors are open, and you don't know what is happening. But a remarkable thing has happened. You have met some other people who have had earthquakes in their life. When they had an earthquake, you noticed they were singing. You really wondered for a while if they had all their marbles. Then you began to realize they have something you don't have. Then instead of trying to get out of the circumstance, they just stayed in the circumstance, and you didn't understand that. So by their example, you begin to realize they had something. So you have come to ask. How can I find some help for me? How can I find some hope in the middle when everything is all turned upside down. How can I have some hope?

Now let me put the three stories together for you. First story is the story of a devout person. The door is open. She sees truth. She comes to Christ. Second story is of a disturbed young lady. She is possessed, but there is a power that comes into her life. When the power comes into her life, she is set free and able to live her life to the fullest. There is a Roman jailer who is deeply disturbed, earthquake in his life, but he found an example and he found hope. He gave his life to Christ. Before the night is over he is down there washing the stripes of the men that he had beaten with a whip. His life is changed. He becomes kind and generous. A lady was at a prayer meeting. A preacher came. A girl was walking down the street. She was thrown in contact with someone else. And a Roman jailer in the middle of the night everything fell apart, and all of a sudden he met someone else. You see God talks different ways to different folks at different times through different methods, but it is always the same--the story of Christ. Let me close by telling you, you can't read Acts 16 without recognizing what had happened in the life of Paul. Paul was a Pharisee. A Pharisee was the orthodox of the orthodox. Every morning when Paul woke up, this is what he prayed. This is the prayer of the Pharisees. Dear God, I thank you that I am not a Gentile. Yet he is a man who prayed that for the first 30 years of his life. He is sitting down talking to a Roman jailer. I thank you, dear God, I am not a slave, and he is in church with a slave. The third prayer of the Pharisees was and I thank God I am not a woman. Lydia, the business woman, turned to him and said O.K. male chauvinist, do you accept me as a believer? If you do, come home with me. The man who had prayed it every day of his life for 30 days went to Lydia's house. Jesus not only changes people for the first time. Jesus knocks all those walls and bearers that we want to build up, and puts all of us together as family.

I read the book of Philippians quite frequently. This is the way it starts: I thank my God for every remembrance of you. You know who was sitting in church? Lydia! The slave girl. And the Roman jailer--I thank my God when I remember all of you because Christ had brought them together in Him. You may be here today, and you are a Lydia. You really want to know, sensitive spirit. Jesus comes to you with the truth. You may be here feeling that you are not in charge of your life any more. I want to tell you there is a power that can change and transform you. You may be here--you have had an earthquake. I want to tell you there is a hope to begin again in Jesus Christ. I want to tell you He will put you with people who will help you along the way. Some of you are here today who need to give your life to Christ. Some of you are Christians who very much need a church family and a church home, a place where God can meld us together and help us to join together. You need to come to be a part of our church family.