

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 16B_Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey - Continued)

Introduction

In our last study, we observed Luke's account of the beginning of Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey – a journey that so far has taken Paul and his party through portions of Asia Minor where he had traveled on his first journey. After being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to travel northward to Bithynia and southwesterly to Asia, Paul is led by a vision to cross over the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. The mission party stop in Philippi where the first event that Luke records of significance is the conversion of a wealthy woman named Lydia along with all of her household. Lydia, from Thyatira in Asia, had a house in Philippi and offered to house Paul and his party. We have observed what an amazing woman she was, especially for her day and time. She was evidently very wealthy, she ran her own business, she may have been a widow, she was very open and receptive to the gospel, she had a loyal household of perhaps a combination of family members and servants and she was extremely hospitable. She immediately submitted to the gospel and she was baptized immediately along with her household.

With the narrative of the conversion of Lydia and her household, Luke reminds us again of the principle we have seen on several occasions in our study thus far.¹ Had Lydia not been availing herself to the Lord, Lydia would have missed an opportunity to have been used of the Lord in an incredible way. Her availability to be used was based upon two things: 1) she was physically where she could be used; and 2) she had a servant's attitude.

Observation: Lydia was availing herself to the Lord – physically and mentally.

Observation: Other women were present at the river that Sabbath.

Observation: Luke's narrative doesn't indicate whether any other women were converted and/or offered to assist with the care and provision for God's servants.

Observation: Lydia demonstrated hospitality towards other believers who were involved in the Lord's work.

Interpretation: Although wealthy and involved in the world's commerce, Lydia had not allowed the business of the world (the exigencies or details of life) to snuff out her spiritual vitality.

Interpretation: Such a demonstration of immediate response to Truth only results when the individual has consistently sought the Lord through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, study, & meditation thus placing themselves in a spiritual and mental position to recognize opportunity for service.

Interpretation: Lydia's internal beauty was demonstrated in outward manifestations.

¹ For instance, we have observed that Paul and Barnabas were already involved in ministry when the Lord opened the door and led them more specifically into missionary activity by setting them apart for a ministry to the Gentiles. See Acts 13:1-3 and a previous set of notes titled "SB_Acts13B_Paul's First Journey."

Interpretation: Although wealthy in the things of this world, Lydia was more wealthy in heavenly things (see Ephesians 1:3)

Interpretation: Although “self-sufficient” by the world’s measure, Lydia possessed the humility to recognize her deficiency spiritually that was only satisfied by God in and through Jesus.

Principle: Hospitality requires a servant attitude. If the believer doesn’t appreciate all that the Lord has done, there will be no graciousness demonstrated towards others.

Principle: A servant attitude is only present in the believer who has an attitude of gratitude for all that the Lord has done in their lives.

Principle: The believer who does not focus any energy towards meditating on the spiritual realities will never see beyond themselves.

Principle: A self-centered believer is one who is still a spiritual babe.

Principle: Hospitality is an outward manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit of which Paul speaks in Galatians 5:22-23a.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal 5:22-23a)

Principle: Constant focus on the exigencies of this life creates an attitude of self-sufficiency that will and does blind the believer to the all-sufficiency of Christ.

Application: Do you have a servant’s attitude towards others? Do you demonstrate hospitality for other believers or even unbelievers so that they might be won?

Distinction: When considering acts of servitude for others, recognize the fact that the outward display can be counterfeited. Acts of servitude for others can be motivated by: 1) true spiritual gratitude for all that the Lord has done in one’s life; 2) fake spirituality motivated by approbation lust (similar to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5); or 3) the ascetic trend of one’s sin nature.

Personal Note: If Lydia was a widow, her husband was an incredibly fortunate man while he was alive and married to her. A wife who diligently seeks the Lord and who has an attitude of gratitude that is a manifestation of humility of soul is a woman who will receive praise and honor from her husband (see Proverbs 31). The world and modern sociological theory scoffs at such notions of the serving wife; however, statistics do not lie. The happiest and most fulfilling marriages are those in which each servant spouse appreciates the contribution of the other servant spouse (Eph 5:21ff). In today’s Western culture where young women have no older women who can train them on how to love their husbands and no fathers who exercised authority in love, woe to the husband who has to be a father to his bride-child. Lydia must have had very good spiritual parenting to have been such a woman of substance who also possessed such a character of humility. The only thing that sustains personal relationships is personal character on the part of both individuals (2 Cor 6:14 – “Do not be unequally yoked...”).² The problem is only compounded by the fact that it takes character to perceive and truly appreciate character in another. Lydia saw Paul’s character borne of servant status to the Lord and honored that character with service of her own.

² Even though this passage has specific reference to and is a prohibition against a believer marrying an unbeliever, there is a sense in which believers can be unequally yoked in marriage.

Principle: When we serve those who are servants of the Lord, we are serving Christ.

Paul and Silas are Imprisoned, Beaten and Their Jailer is Saved (16:16-40)

As Paul, Silas, Luke and the missionary party began to witness and evangelize in this Gentile city, a young slave girl who was demon possessed began to follow them around. The Greek of this passage indicates that the evil spirit which possessed this young girl was the spirit of "Python." In Greek mythology, Python was a large serpent which guarded Delphi, and which Apollo killed in order to establish his shrine and oracle at Delphi. Also, according to Greek mythology, when Apollo killed the serpent, he took both the serpent's gift of prediction and sometimes its form on occasion. Apollo became known as Pythian Apollo. Eventually, Python was used in reference to someone who was possessed with a spirit of divination and through whom a demon would speak using ventriloquism. This slave girl brought much gain to her masters by fortune-telling and was regarded by the inhabitants of Philippi as being inspired by Apollo. People would pay for the girl's soothsaying and predictive capabilities and she was earning her masters a sizable sum of money.³ We can see how this occurred in our passage, for at least on this occasion, her prophecies are accurate – "these men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (16:17).

There have no doubt been many occasions when God has used the power of nature to accomplish a work in the spiritual heart of man. Martin Luther began a journey that would lead him to understanding the Truth of the Gospel when he was terrified by the experience of an unexpectedly violent thunderstorm that caught him out in the open country with no protection. John Newton, a worker on a slave ship in the mid-1700's, was forced to reflect upon God's mercy and the fact that he didn't deserve it when the ship almost sank during a violent storm at sea. About fifteen years later, John Newton would become a minister in the Church of England and write an autobiographical hymn named "Amazing Grace."⁴

Satan's most deceptive tactics always involve counterfeits to the truth. What the young woman said was true, but after it was repeated over a period of days, it became obvious to Paul that this woman was demon possessed and being used by Satan to present an alternate source of truth to the citizens of Philippi. Satan's logic – "If people listen to Paul, they may be converted, but if I can speak things through this girl that are also true, then the gospel will be neutralized by what people perceive as an alternate source of truth." It was the ploy of relativism – a neutralizing tactic employed by Satan in his cosmos.

Note the anti-Semitic tone to the accusations of those who opposed Paul and his party – "these men, being Jews....us, being Romans" (Acts 16:20-21). This might explain why Timothy (a half-Gentile) and Luke (a Gentile) were not imprisoned with Paul and Silas. The financial loss of the masters of the slave girl served as the anvil of pressure to force their true character and sentiments to the service. They abused the law to accomplish their objective.

Rome permitted the peoples of its colonies to have their own religions but not to proselytize Roman citizens. The civil leaders could not distinguish between Judaism and Christianity (cf. 18:14-15), so they would see the preaching of Paul and Silas as a flagrant infraction of imperial law.⁵

³ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 105-106.

⁴ E. Michael and Sharon Rusten, *The One Year Book of Christian History* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 162-163.

⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts" in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985), 400.

Observation: Financial pressure revealed the true sentiments and character of these men.

Interpretation: One of the greatest obstacles to the advancement of the work of Christ is the selfishness of men and women.

Principle: Pressure in life reveals true character.

Principle: God uses the pressures in life to form character in believers.

Application: How do you handle pressure in life? Do you strike out against other people in retaliation? Are you bitter? Are you jealous? Do you become even more determined to get your own way? Or, do you deal with the pressures of life through prayer and thanksgiving like Paul (16:25).

Imagine the physical pain that Paul and Silas must have had from the beating. Their backs had been beaten and they probably had open wounds since the clothes of a Roman prisoner were torn to expose the flesh to the rods. (Paul experienced this ordeal on at least three separate occasions – 2 Cor 11:23, 25). They were in a nasty jail cell with hard stone floors and their feet were shackled and chained or secured in some fashion. They had every reason to complain and discuss their plans for revenge. Yet, they even used that suffering as a time of testimony by praying and singing hymns. No doubt, this was something that had not been heard previously in that Roman prison. This experience in the Philippian jail was the historical backdrop and had particular significance to his audience of readers when Paul wrote to them.⁶ Also, compare Paul's instruction to Peter's exhortation to believers.

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents – which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Phil 1:27-30)

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world. (Phil 2:14-15)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. (1 Pet 4:12-16)

⁶ Paul would have been in Philippi on this 2nd journey around A.D. 50. He revisited Philippi on his 3rd journey in about A.D. 56 and he wrote his letter to the Philippians during his Roman imprisonment in A.D. 60-62.

As the prisoners listened (v. 25), they listened intently or with pleasure as indicated by the Greek verbage here.⁷ Suddenly, an earthquake rattled the ground and shook the foundation of the building so violently that the jail doors opened and even the chains of the prisoners were loosed. The prisoners were so impressed by what they had witnessed that they stood around in amazement. The jailer was sure that some had escaped and he knew his fate, so he was about to take his own life. When Paul assured him that everything was alright and that none had escaped, the jailer was so impressed by this act of mercy that he became convinced of the truth about which Paul and Silas had been speaking.

By this time in Philippi, everyone had most likely heard about the salvation that these two men had been preaching. They may have even spoken with the jailer as he bound their feet. He was probably skeptical of a message preached by two men whose feet he was binding. "How can these men represent the Truth if they are being treated as criminals?" "How can they proclaim a message of power and hope when I have the power to imprison them?" However, when he saw the power of God displayed in the form of an earthquake and all of those things he thought were constants in life (i.e. the earth) shaken and when these demonstrations of power were contrasted with the mercy shown to him by Paul and Silas, he was moved to faith. The change of thinking (repentance) that had occurred in his soul was accompanied by acts of kindness and mercy towards those he had imprisoned. He begins to nurse their wounds.

Observation: Paul and Silas did not hold a grudge or seek revenge against the jailer who had beaten them.

Observation: Paul and Silas were beaten; however, they sang praises to the Lord while in jail that night.

Interpretation: Paul and Silas, as mature or maturing believers, possessed objectivity.

Interpretation: As a result of their objectivity, Paul and Silas made a distinction between those in authority and those who followed the orders of those in authority.

Interpretation: Paul and Silas had a conscious awareness of the fact that they were in a spiritual war and that their every action was 1) related to the spiritual war and 2) being observed by others as a testimony. How they dealt with injustice was being observed and their response would be emulated or at least examined for inconsistencies between their behavior and teaching.

Interpretation: Had Paul and Silas not possessed objectivity and a paradigm of behavior that was shaped by a conscious awareness of their part in the spiritual war, God would not have been able to use them as He did in this situation. They would have missed the opportunity to be used of the Lord as they were in such a dramatic way.

Application: Do you possess objectivity? Are you consciously aware that you are involved in a spiritual war daily? Does this understanding or paradigm guide your behavior? How many opportunities are you missing to be used by the Lord in the testimony of your response to life situations? Is your behavior shaped by an objective understanding of the greater panorama of human history or is it shaped by selfishness and self-centeredness?

Principle: There are no invisible spiritual heroes. They may not be acknowledged by the world, but their spiritual impact is exponential in the sense that a spiritual hero has impact upon more than one generation.

⁷ See Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1930), 260. The imperfect tense of *epākroaomai* (ἐπακροάομαι) is used. It is a "rare verb" meaning to "listen with pleasure as to a recitation or music."

The Water Baptism of the Philippian Jailer and His Household (16:31-33)

We must remember that Luke is condensing the events of several hours in this set of verses. Otherwise, we risk misinterpreting the narrative to be a statement of doctrine rather than a synopsis of an historical event. Some theologians and bodies of faith teach that one must be baptized to be saved. Others teach that water baptism must be by means of complete immersion. Some make new “converts” wait for a period akin to probation to insure that they are ready for baptism. Finally, there are those who claim that when the head of a household is saved, the rest of the household is automatically saved.

However, this passage cannot be used to support any of these interpretive grids. First, Paul does not say anything about having to be baptized in order to be saved. Notice that he says “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Second, Paul’s instruction to the jailer was equally applicable to the jailer’s household. Each person had to believe in order to be saved. The whole of Scripture embraces the notion of volitional responsibility – each person is responsible and accountable for their own decisions. To claim otherwise on the basis of this passage alone is contrary to the whole of Scriptural teaching.

Third, in his narrative, Luke indicates that the baptism of these people was immediate. Throughout the book of Acts, we see a similar pattern of people being baptized as soon as they are saved or as soon as they believed. The passage doesn’t indicate exactly how they were baptized. We are forced to wonder if Paul have a tank of water large enough for him and the person being baptized to enter – especially since these events evidently occurred over the course of one evening and the next morning. Could arrangements for such a baptism be made “immediately” as the text indicates? These arrangements would have included the jailer getting Paul and Silas out of jail, securing the jail so the other prisoners could not escape, nursing the wounds of Paul and Silas, and listening to Paul and Silas explain the Scriptures. There are more ways to signify a ritual cleansing than through a complete immersion.

It is quite possible that the baptism was by immersion; however, we don’t know that point of fact, nor was it significant enough for Luke to note it. It really doesn’t matter, especially since Paul does not later teach that baptism is a ritual than the Body of Christ is required to observe.

Note: It is interesting that everyone who becomes a believer during these missionary journeys of Paul takes personal risk of some type. Lydia took financial risks by associating with Paul and Silas. The jailer risked his life for these prisoners by taking them out of their jail confinement and entrusting them to not escape from his home. It is a pattern that we see repeated frequently in these early days of the 1st Century.

Paul and Silas are Released (16:35-40)

Apparently, the city rulers only wanted to teach Paul and Silas a lesson since they commanded that they be released the next morning. If this is a correct read of the situation, then it is easy to see the religious-political symbiosis that was present in Philippi and the similarities to the scenario that Jesus faced during His earthly ministry.

- During His earthly ministry and life, Jesus faced opposition from an ingrained and inbred religious-political symbiotic relationship that existed between the Jewish religious leadership and the Roman ruling authorities.
- Paul and Silas faced opposition from a religious-political alliance of a non-Jewish sort – an alliance between the occult-inspired worship of the Greek god Apollo and the governing authorities.
- In both cases, the opposition was motivated in large part by the fact that the Truth exposed the lie and hypocrisy upon which the financial and political power base had been built and perpetuated.

- In both cases, the suppression of the Truth by the religious-political power base led to a restriction of freedom.

Luke doesn't record for us why Paul did not claim the protection of his Roman citizenship prior to the beating, thus avoiding a painful and humiliating experience. We could perhaps speculate that Paul wanted to 1) provide an example for the new believers and/or 2) place the magistrates in a weaker position where they might be afraid to persecute the new converts.⁸ Paul was empowered by having endured the beating. He had demonstrated that even though he taught a gospel that was strange to these people, he was submissive to Roman rule and not an instigator of a revolution. In addition, he allowed the magistrates to publicly embarrass themselves so that they were forced to admit their error when they had to personally release Paul and Silas from prison.

Observation: Paul observed the laws of the governing authorities and submitted himself to inappropriate and even unlawful treatment.

Observation: Paul did not immediately demand his rights.

Observation: Those who abused their position of authority were exposed for who they really were to those with eyes to perceive.

Observation: Paul exhorts believers to submit to governing authorities in Romans 13:1-7 and in that passage, Paul indicates (among other things) that believers are to pay due taxes.

Observation: Paul also exhorts believers in Romans 12:9-21 to "bless those who persecute you" and "if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

Observation: Paul eventually demanded that his rights be acknowledged by the authorities who had abused those rights.

Observation: Once the authorities had acknowledged their error, Paul did not press the issue further.

Interpretation: Paul knew that the way was now paved for him to continue to preach and teach the Truth freely, yet he also knew that to preserve the freedom he had been given and to avoid a backlash, it would be best if he left town in accordance with the request of the authorities. Paul knew he could come back at a future time if he desired. Paul determined a course of action that would have the best possibility of preserving the freedom of his fellow believers.

Principle: Submission to authority does not mean that the authority is right or that you agree with the authority.

Principle: Believers should submit to governmental authority in the interest of preserving the freedom of all believers to practice and proclaim the Truth.

Principle: If the governmental authority to which the believer is subject continues a policy of oppression and restriction of freedom to the point that the proclamation of Truth is compromised, then the believer has a right to choose to become subject to an alternative form of governmental authority.

Application: How do evaluate the position taken by the American colonists in the War for Independence that began on April 19, 1775 with the firing of the "shot heard 'round the world" in Concord, Massachusetts – colonists who were predominately Calvinists in their theological orientation and who were probably post-millennial in terms of how they viewed their place in

⁸ Baker, *Understanding Acts*, 107.

human history? (Read the April 19th story contained in *The One Year Book of Christian History*).⁹

⁹ Rusten, *The One Year Book of Christian History*, 220-221.