

# The Adventure of the Gospel

Thomas Robinson, February 27, 2011

Acts 16:13-34

## *Paul and Silas in the City of Philippi: Meeting Lydia*

<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.

## *Slave Girl and Freedom; Apostles and 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 (*python*) and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants (slaves) 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 (disturbed), 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.

## *Paul and Silas Set Their Jailer Free*

<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.

<sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. <sup>34</sup> Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.



## A Church Planting by God's Work

Luke here describes the beginning of the church in Philippi in Macedonia, northern Greece led by Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke ("we") and others, after a vision calling them (Act 16:9).

Philippi was a Roman colony (v 21) since 42 b.c. on the Egnatian Road. The church became strong, with a close relationship with Paul: Letter from prison in Ephesus.

Luke highlights three people – very diverse – whose lives were transformed by the Gospel.

Lydia, successful merchant of luxury goods, Gentile attracted to Jewish faith.

Slave girl, used by masters as fortune teller (python spirit), a con that suddenly works.

Jailer, a retired Roman soldier, no nonsense violence, no faith, ready for suicide.

## What Must I Do to Be Saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus!

The Jailer's question has many possible levels: How do I ... get out of this situation alive; get healed from my sickness, brokenness; make sense of my confused/broken hopes/beliefs; break free from the demonic sin/addiction/rage/oppression that enslaves me; find real fulfillment/meaning in life; find a relationship with God my creator? Human problems (personal struggle to global violence) have a common core, loss of God's central reality.

"Believing in the Lord Jesus" has equally extensive life-transforming power as Jesus brings us the reality of God, life, power, deliverance, clarity, history, purpose, guidance, hope.

## Lydia – Opening Heart, Paying Attention

An independent Gentile woman, she has experienced the emptiness of her pagan tradition and is seeking the true and living God of the scriptures – ethics, philosophy, history.

The Spirit works: She listens, she sees the truth of the message, its beauty, meaning, how Jesus the Messiah makes sense of the scripture. She is baptized, enters community.

## Slave Fortune Teller – Revelation, Deliverance

It's hard to know what was happening with this "Python Spirit." Many charlatans, then as now. Suddenly a real revelation breaks in. "Slaves of Most High God...a path of deliverance." She embodies the physical and spiritual enslavement of sin/evil over human beings in so many forms. Rom 6:16 – We are slaves of the sin we obey, leading to death.

She can't break free. But these "Slaves of the Most High" by the power of Jesus Christ can set her free from the enslaving power that made her a tool of her corrupt masters. She got herself back. We don't know what happened, but a new hope for life opened for her.

## The Jailer – A Glimpse of a Different World

He was doing his job, locking up troublemaking Jews in stocks. They were beaten, bloody, humiliated, defeated. He was ready for their curses and groans, but none came. He went to bed while they made the prison a concert of prayer and song with everyone listening.

They lived by values and purposes he did not understand: Phil 3:8-11. They lived in a different world of unconquerable joy and grace. And then the earthquake. And they all stayed!

They should have hated him, but they preserved his life. Thus the question pours out.

He steps into a new world that he has never known. Crucified Jesus as Lord. His whole family is baptized. They're at the start of new life. Joy! They have believed in God!