

# Philippi: Joy facing Painful Challenges

Thomas Robinson, Cities of Hope 5, June 26, 2016

## Acts 16:12-34

### Lydia

<sup>12</sup> [We traveled] to **Philippi**, 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 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 that I am **a believer in the Lord**, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

### A Slave Girl

<sup>16</sup> As we went to the place of prayer, we were met by **a slave girl** having a spirit of divination who provided **her lords** with lots of business by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying, "These people **are slaves of the Most High God**, who are proclaiming to you **a road to deliverance/salvation**."

<sup>18</sup> She kept doing this for many days. Paul, having become disturbed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Messiah to come out of her." And it came out the same hour.

<sup>19</sup> But when **her lords** saw that their hope of business 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 **Roman officers**, they said, "These men are **Jews** and are **causing uproar in our city**." <sup>21</sup> They are proclaiming **customs** that are not lawful for us as **Romans** to accept or practice."

### Paul and Silas Locked Up

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the officers 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 jail, ordering the jailer to keep them in unshakable security. <sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and locked their feet unshakably in the **wooden stocks**.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying** and singing **hymns to God**, and others in bonds were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> But suddenly there was a great **earthquake**, so that the foundations of the jail were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

### The Jailer

<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 those in bonds 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 light and rushed in, and **shaking** he fell down before **Paul and Silas**. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them out and said, "**Sirs (Lords), what must I do to be delivered/saved?**"

<sup>31</sup> And they said, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus**, and you will be **delivered/saved**, you and your house."

<sup>32</sup> And they **spoke the message about 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 **was filled with joy** along with his entire household since **he had trusted/believed in God**.

## Philippians 2:1-2, 5-11

<sup>1</sup> So if there is any encouragement in Messiah, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any deep feeling and compassion, <sup>2</sup> fill up my joy that you think the same thing, having the same love, together in soul and thinking the one thing. ...

<sup>5</sup> Think this among yourselves, which also means in Messiah Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who: Though he was in the form of God, | he did not consider that equality with God | a thing to be exploited, | <sup>7</sup> rather he emptied himself, | by taking the form of a slave, | being born in human likeness. | <sup>8</sup> And being found in human shape, | he humbled himself | by becoming obedient to the point of death, | even death on a cross. | |

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him | and graced him with the name | that is above every name, | <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus | every knee should bow, | of those in heaven and on earth and under earth, | <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess | that "Jesus Messiah is LORD," | to the glory of God the Father.



## Roman City and Its Cast of Characters

Paul is on his 2<sup>nd</sup> mission journey (with Silas, Timothy, Luke and others).

He crosses into Europe to Philippi, named for Alexander the Gt.'s father. Site of battle of Mark Antony & Octavian against Brutus & Cassius, a colony of Rome. On Roman "Egnatian Way."

There is a Jewish community with a 'Place of Prayer' outside the city walls near Gangites River.

Paul finds women there (sitting apart from men?) including Lydia, a merchant, a gentile 'God-fearer,' seeking new identity. She listens to the story of Jesus as Lord, becomes a believer in the Lord. She is baptized and offers her home as a base for the group teaching others by the river.

A slave girl, with 'Python spirit,' double slave fortune-teller. Corruption of Gk religious tradition as business for slave-owners: 'her lords.' She becomes a prophet crying "slaves of God Most High proclaiming a road to deliverance." Deliverance from what?—oppressive powers, Roman, demonic, enslaving, corrupt religion. Paul frees her from the spirit, but that stops her fortune-telling biz.

The power structure: Her Lords, profit-seeking slave-owners. Roman Officers standing for Lord Caesar's control. The crowd fearing outsiders. The soldiers beating Paul, instruments of violence. All trust the unshakable power of Rome. The uproar caused by Jewish outsiders telling about a different Lord and his power of deliverance must be securely locked down and silenced.

The Jailer does his job. Paul & Silas locked in stocks in a secure cell. But who is free? With songs and prayers, Paul & Silas are not stopped by jail walls. The earthquake shakes the unshakable power. Paul stops the Jailer from self-execution for his oppressive Roman Lord. He comes in shaking: "How do I find this deliverance?" You have to find a new Lord — Crucified Jesus is Lord!

## Who is Lord of Life and Death? Really!

These were the stories believers in Philippi remembered about their foundation, their commitment.

Differing stories, all involved pain and hope, radical change of life, seeing the world differently.

Running through all is an emphasis on the word Lord (*kurios*) in various meanings. It is the great name of God in Scripture. But in society it marks the structure of power, success, and meaning.

Lydia had found the Lord God, but now the Lord opens her to the Lord Jesus. She experiences an opening of her world as a Gentile. The slave girl is under her slave Lords and their business with an enslaving spirit. Her deliverance means a radical change of life, very different from Lydia. The slave lords draw in the enforcing power of the Roman Lords with soldiers and Jailer. But those in power here are in chains of greed, prejudice, fear of outsiders, anger, corruption, abuse of power.

## Lord of Joy in a World turned Right Side Up

About 5 yrs later, Paul writes a letter to them from jail in Ephesus. So much has happened but the fundamentals are the same. They have to live in the power structures of the world, but they see that they're deceptive, founded in the power of death that seems permanent but is passing.

Thus Paul can meditate on life and death, with peace and calm. He can call them to rejoice always, and live within a Peace that is beyond understanding with strength to deal with any circumstance.

What unifies and shapes them is the New Lord at the center of their lives who reveals the nature of God and all reality. He empties himself for us in self-giving love, serves, and even dies for us.

The Lord of the Universe says, That is who I Am. The Crucified Jesus is "LORD." His crucifixion turns the world's power on its head. New welcoming identity. Freedom from slavery. Songs break out!