

Acts 16:11-40: Good News for All

One thing I love about Christianity is that it's good news for all types of people:

- Educated
- Non-educated
- Men, women and children
- People from different nations

Working our way through Acts and last week we heard that Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man calling him: Come over to Macedonia and help us"
Paul concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel

Today we'll hear how Paul preached the gospel and brought good news to three very different people:

Point number one:

Good News for The Religious

16:13

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

Paul and his mission partners made the quick and favourable journey to Philippi

- I like to think of Philippi a little like Hamilton
 - o It wasn't the largest city or the capital city but it was a really important city in the region- just like Hamilton right
 - o Philippi was a Roman provincial city which meant it had high status in the Empire and Rome gave it special privilege
 - o It was surrounded by natural resources of copper, silver, gold and a fertile plain and so it was a wealthy city as well
 - o Again just like the beautiful city of Hamilton- maybe I've been influenced by Michael and Kimberly a bit- always very positive about Hamilton
- No accident that Paul targeted this city to preach the gospel

And in his common pattern on the Sabbath, Paul seeks out the Jews first with the good news of Jesus, but for whatever reason there's no syngagoue only a place of prayer about 2km's outside the city by the river

- And Paul proclaims the gospel to the women who've gathered there
 - o We're not told where the men are, but we know there's a bunch of religiously faithful women

And we hear about one woman in particular: Lydia

- We learn she's from Thyatira and a seller of purple goods
 - o This means she's a business woman and she's wealthy because purple cloth was special and expensive, she's a very capable woman

- Not only that, but Lydia was a worshipper of God
 - o She's probably not a full convert to Judaism but she's a devout Gentile believer
- So Lydia is a capable business woman and a pious woman: no doubt you've got friends or family like Lydia

And then we hear this at the end of **v14**:

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Paul has preached the gospel and Lydia has heard it but at the end of the day it's always and only by divine grace, by God's spirit working in people's hearts that brings people to saving faith in Jesus

- We can do the best sermon ever, we can explain the gospel to our friends in the clearest and most connecting and sensitive way
- But at the end of the day God is the one who opens hearts, we only turn to God in repentance when he's worked first in our hearts

This should give us great assurance and confidence, God uses our weak and bumbling efforts, he works through broken people like you and me to open people's hearts

- This means we don't have to be hindered by the fear: but I won't share the gospel well, or I'm not gifted to do it
- Sisters and brothers where does the power of salvation lie? In our efforts or in the power of God?

And so the first convert in Macedonia, in Europe it would seem is a Religious woman

And did you notice how Lydia responded?

- She and her whole household got baptised, now whatever you think about baptism, it's clear 1st century people had a much more corporate view of life rather than our individualistic view: it's more than just me and God, it's us and God
- And Lydia's new faith flows over to hospitality and generosity
- When you're captured by Jesus' love for you at great cost to himself, how can you not share your possessions and life?

So Good news for the Religious, our second point is:

Good News for the Spiritual

16:16

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. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."

Paul and his companions are just going about their business, just heading out to place of prayer minding their own business when they get hassled

- Have you ever had this, just going about your business and then someone comes up to you, maybe asking for money or some cause
- Or you're going about your business and you get those nuisance calls again and again

Well that's a little like what happened to Paul except Paul's nuisance person

- Is a female slave possessed by a spirit, literally a python spirit which connects her to the Delphic oracle and the Greek god Apollo and to future telling
- And unsurprisingly if you can predict the future, or at least if people think you can you can make a lot of money with that, which is exactly what her owners did
- And for some reason she keeps following Paul around shouting out who they are and what they're on about

Now you might be thinking, surely this is good news right? Paul's getting free advertising: he's from God and he is proclaiming the way to salvation

- So what's the problem
- The problem is we understand it, but for Gentiles hearing this back then it was a pretty ambiguous message
- For them Zeus was God most high, not the God of the Bible
- Also the way of salvation could mean many things, rather than Jesus being the way, the truth and the life, the Emperor called himself the saviour of the people
- So the problem is what the female slave is shouting is easily misinterpreted

But Paul shrugs it off when it happens once, but when it happens again and again and again, day after day after day, Paul's had enough, he's reached the end of his patience

- Now if you're a parent with young children, especially in lockdown you get it right
- You love your kids deeply, but day after day of being followed around and being clung to, you just get to the point where you need some space, that's how I imagine Paul felt

And did you notice where Paul's authority comes from when he drives the spirit out of the female slave?

V18

"I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

Paul makes it very clear that his power to cast out the spirit isn't from some Greek god or other spiritual power, no Paul's power comes from Jesus Christ himself, the very same Jesus Paul is proclaiming throughout the city

- Which is another helpful reminder that while the spiritual world is real and powerful Jesus is Lord over the spirits, Jesus is Lord of all
- Which means we don't need to fear the spiritual world, which is a huge thing if you've grown up fearing the spirits

The good news for the female slave was that she was freed from the spirit controlling her

- But we're not told whether the female slave became a Christian or not, maybe she started listening to Paul or got connected to Lydia, we don't know

What we do know is that her owners aren't very happy because they lost their income stream in **v19**

- Just an aside how sad it is and how common it is that we see money as more important than salvation, or maybe it's status or control or just the I want to live life my way
- The owners had seen and no doubt heard the power of Jesus and they don't turn to him for salvation

The owners drag Paul and Silas off to the authorities and hurl ridiculous and basically false accusations against them in **vv20-21**

- They're Jews, disturbing the city and advocating foreign customs
- And so Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown into prison and the emphasis in **v24** is that they're in the inner most cell, they're in the most secure and fortified part of the prison, no chance of escaping right?

Point number three:

Good News for the Secular:

16:25

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶and 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

Time and again in Acts we hear how followers of Jesus suffer unjustly for the name of Jesus

- Again it's part and parcel of the Christian faith

And yet Paul and Silas' unjust suffering hasn't dampened their spirits

The church Father Tertullian said of this passage:

- "The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven"

When faced with suffering and hardship Paul and Silas shift to prayer and praise

- Someone in Sydney noticed that when the Sydney Anglicans responded to the Pandemic there was a lot of focus on not wasting a crisis and making sure to look after ourselves, all good things but not very much mention or corporate focus on prayer let alone praise
- Suffering and hardship has the ability to focus us on what's truly important or to distract us, and I'm saying this as someone who's just come out of 106 days of continuous hard lockdown

While they're in the secure most, unescapable part of the prison, God has other ideas and sends an earthquake to free them in **v26**

- Now why did God send an earthquake, why didn't he just send an angel like he did for Peter in **Acts 12**?
- The earthquake wasn't for Paul and Silas, in fact they remain in prison and don't escape in **vv27-28**, the earthquake was for the Jailer, because for him an earthquake was a symbol of a god showing up
- And after Paul and Silas stop him from killing himself, the Jailer works out the earthquake is connected to the god Paul has been proclaiming and the salvation this God gives

And so he asks the question in **v30** that has been asked throughout the ages and from people from every part of the world:

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

And the answer is beautiful:

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Paul later says in **Rom 10:9**

If you declare with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved

Salvation, the good news of Jesus, has nothing to do with your education level, your income or wealth, how good a person you are, how religious you are, it has to do 100% with who Jesus is and what he's done for us at the cross and through his resurrection

And again notice the Philippian Jailer's response to finding salvation in Jesus:

- He brings them to his house, he washes their wounds, he feeds them, he's filled with joy: does your salvation fill you with you
- And notice 3x we're told his whole household believed- again salvation is more than just me and God, there's a real corporate aspect that we can easily miss

Finally, as we finish I just want to draw our attention to Paul's release:

- **Vv35-36** In the morning the authorities tell Paul he can leave, obviously they're not guilty and the text stresses the stealthy manner of their release
- But Paul says in **v37**: hey none of this secret business: come and publicly demonstrate that we're innocent

Now why does Paul do this? Why is he drawing attention to his rights as a Roman citizen?

- Paul wants it known publicly that in proclaiming the gospel they didn't cause trouble, they obeyed the authorities
- Paul wants the Christian community to have a good public reputation among the authorities and wider society
- Civil disobedience especially in Acts and the NT is tied to enabling the gospel to go out, it's only when the gospel proclamation or living God's way is threatened that civil disobedience is permitted

So we've heard how the Gospel is good news for the Religious, the Spiritual and the Secular John Stott said:

there were few people more diverse ethnically, socially, psychologically and culturally than Lydia, the girl and the jailer, and yet Paul engaged them all with a gospel intended for all

The Good News of Jesus is what Hamilton needs and its good news for every single person

Amen