

“In the Gospel the Power of God is Revealed”

Acts 16

On Wednesday night we did a study on Romans 1:8-17 and we looked at Paul’s love for people and his passion for the gospel to change lives. Not just for salvation but for building all disciples up. He said in Rom. 1:5,

⁵ Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

When we believe the gospel – the good news that God’s Son became human, lived a sinless life, was crucified on the cross, dying for our sins and rose from the dead – we receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the Holy Spirit who now dwells in us to help us to obey Jesus in living out the gospel. Paul says faith in the gospel results in obedience to live out the gospel. The gospel impacts us every day, not just the day we were saved. He also said this in 1 Thes. 1:4

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ... you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The good news that Jesus saved us continues to cause us to want to obey God and live this new life out in faith. Paul will go on to say in Romans 1:16,

¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.

In the gospel the power of God is revealed that saves us and changes us to live by faith. Here in Acts 16 we see different ways the power of God is revealed through the gospel – positive and negative. My prayer is that when we are done, the amazing power of the gospel as seen here will encourage us to share it more readily and live it out more boldly. [pray]

Quick review. Acts 16 records Paul’s 2nd mission trip. Leaves with Silas from Jerusalem, up north to Antioch, then to Tarsus (home town) and then back to the Galatian churches he planted before. While in Derbe he meets Timothy. Impressed by his maturity and giftedness Paul wants to mentor Timothy and calls him to join them. Paul then plans to go north and circle back east, then south to where he started. But the Spirit redirects him westward to Troas and then across the sea to go to Macedonia, Greece. While in Troas Paul meets Luke who joins them.

Following the Spirit’s leading they go into Macedonia and end up in Philippi where Paul searches for a synagogue but doesn’t find one but hears some Jewish women are meeting for prayer down by the river. Here he meets Lydia, a wealthy business woman and leads her and her house of servants to faith through the gospel. But as we continue reading Paul leads a demon possessed girl

to faith in Christ and then later on leads the Philippian jailer and his family to Christ. All with the gospel. So when we sit back and look at the chapter as a whole, we are reminded and encouraged that ...

The Gospel has the Power to Change Anyone's Life **(16:13-31)**

Let's look at these people a little more closely. With Lydia we see that the gospel has the power to change

The 'successful' (16:13-15)

Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. Purple cloth was rare and expensive. Very high in demand from the wealthy and people of status. Which puts Lydia in that same category. But she's a woman of prayer and a worshipper of God. Paul shares the gospel with her and she responds in faith. People of her household are also there. They respond to the gospel as well. They are all baptized. She then uses her resources to open her home to Paul and his travelers. Perhaps this was one of the places Paul meant in Phil 4:12 when he said

¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Paul had learned by faith to trust God and be content whatever the circumstances. But why would Lydia be searching for God and respond to the gospel? She was a success in the world. She had money, position, owned a house full of servants. But somehow that didn't satisfy her. She was looking for God that's why she was praying at the river. Undaunted that there was no official synagogue to go to. Something about success didn't satisfy her. She was looking for God and God found her through the gospel with Paul.

Obviously she had a great impact on her servants. They saw the genuine difference the gospel made in her life. They responded in faith as well. Don't be fooled that the 'successful' people in the world are happy. Success, money and power do not provide ultimate satisfaction. They do not give one peace with God and forgiveness of sins. Successful people don't always feel a success. They have the resources like Solomon to pursue happiness and pleasure in ways most people can't. But they are no different than anyone else. They are not and can't be satisfied by anything the world has to offer. That's why the gospel can change their life. It gives them peace of heart and mind and an eternal purpose. And a way in which they can now see how God can use their resources in eternally satisfying ways.

Paul next encounters a slave girl who can tell fortunes because she has a demonic spirit in her. She actually follows Paul and his entourage around proclaiming '*These men are servants of the Most High God telling you to be saved.*' Sounds like free advertising! But Paul is not impressed perhaps because he doesn't want this kind of attention. And we don't know how she was saying it. Maybe shrieking it or as a warning to people to stay away. Whatever the situation, Paul is bothered by this and one day commands the spirit to come out of her. The spirit does and it stops speaking through the girl. Now, it doesn't actually say she accepted Christ but I don't know of any example in the gospels where Jesus cast out a demon and that didn't result in them wanting to follow Jesus. So I think we're safe to assume she accepted Christ.

But the formerly demon possessed girl also shows us the gospel has the power to change the lives of

Those captive to Satan (vv.16-18)

One doesn't have to be demon possessed to be under the enemy's influence. We read in 2 Cor. 4:4 that

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

And in 2 Cor. 11:14-15 Paul also adds

¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.

There are all kinds of people whom Satan has convinced they are righteous and good because there are many religions in the world that promote self-righteousness; that you are okay with God based on your goodness. The good news of the gospel first spells out the bad news that we all sin and we are not right with God. But the good news is that Jesus paid the penalty for sin and if we believe in Him God gives us a righteousness as Paul says in Rom. 1:16 '*a righteous from God is revealed through the gospel*'. God makes us right with Himself when we confess we are not right with God and believe in Jesus' provision for us on the cross.

So, not surprising – as each one of us is a firsthand eye witness – that when we heard the gospel, the Spirit revealed to us our unrighteousness through our works, whereby we confessed that we were in need of forgiveness from Jesus and believed in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and then confessed with our mouth Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9-10). That's the power of the Word of God. Satan doesn't want to hear the Word of God because the Word of God has the power to silence Satan (Jesus' temptations), to cast out his demonic servants (seen here and in the gospels), to free people from his lies (when any of us get saved) and his ultimate defeat as Rev. 20 tells us.

Paul's casting out the demon from this woman silences her which angers her masters who cause a commotion which ends up with Paul and Silas being arrested, flogged and thrown in prison where they were locked in stocks by the jailer. Yet Paul and Silas sang songs about Jesus and were praying and the other prisoners were listening to them. And when the earthquake happened and the jailer was about to kill himself because he would have been killed by his superiors for letting the prisoners escape (which they didn't), he cries out to Paul (who already saved his physical life) 'What must I do to be saved?' (spiritually). And Paul leads him and his family and others in his house to the Lord when he preached the gospel to them. The gospel has the power to change

The hopeless of the world (vv.24-31)

The jailer (and possibly his household too) were without hope. He thought his life was over but the gospel overpowered his hopelessness and gave him hope beyond this life. So the gospel can change anyone. No matter how wealthy or successful they look, they are often empty on the inside. Many of us were unknowingly held under Satan's influence when we believed the lies that we were righteous in our own goodness, until the gospel frees us. And some here and many others had given up on life and had nowhere to look for hope when they heard the gospel and received Christ. The gospel has the power to change anyone's life because the Word of God is eternal.

But as we know from trying to share the gospel many people do not accept Christ. As we see here in Acts 16

The Gospel Threatens Those Opposed to God **(16:16-40)**

Who do we see here is threatened by the gospel?

The enemy – Satan (vv.16-18)

The gospel threatens him because he can't overpower it when the Spirit takes the Word and touches someone's life. The demon in the servant girl is no match for the Holy Spirit. God wins, Satan loses. The gospel is a threat to Satan. He is not happy when the Word of God is shared. He can't stand up to the power of God.

What types of people are threatened by the gospel?

The Self-absorbed and the worldly minded (vv.19-21)

The masters of the slave girl had only one purpose in life: make money by any means possible. When the girl is freed from the demon they get mad. Why? Because they can't make money from her anymore. People are throw away objects. People only serve a purpose if they can advance their agenda. The gospel threatens people's selfish pursuits in life; their desire to satisfy themselves with money, fame or power. The world is full of self-absorbed people. People like these charlatans who, when their selfish pursuits are hindered by the truth, lash out by using their influence to discredit those who preach the gospel. They lie by accusing Christians of destroying people's way of life instead of improving it. They say we (Christians) threaten the very life everyone wants. Gospel people must be stopped. And it takes very little for the crowds to be swayed; people whose view of life is limited to what-ever the world has to offer. And even the jailer and guards mistreat Paul and Silas because they see them as people who are here to disrupt their way of life.

Who else is threatened by the gospel?

The 'power players' (vv.37-40)

Once Paul and Silas are freed (and remain in prison!) the authorities order their release. As if they are showing kindness because they are in power. Paul doesn't let it go so easily and tells them they are Roman citizens. This of course alarms those in power because physically punishing a Roman citizen is a no-no. Then they request Paul and Silas to leave. They even give them an escort. At no time are they interested in the gospel. They are threatened by Paul and Silas' peace in this trial and their lack of intimidation by those in power. When Christians graciously stand up for the Lord and show we are not afraid of those who only possess worldly power, they actually feel threatened. They don't know how to handle that because they don't understand where we get our peace.

We see here and all over this passage how

The Gospel Empowers People **(16:6-40)**

Look at the different ways God's people are empowered in this chapter. In vv.6-15 we see how Paul and Silas and the team

Do God's desires over our own (vv.6-15)

They had a plan to revisit the churches and circle back north then east, but God wanted them to go west to Greece and reach new people. Paul and Silas were about doing God's will more than theirs. God enables them and us when we choose God's desires over ours.

To ask God to do the miraculous (vv.16-18)

We see Paul perform the miracle of casting out the demon in the power of Jesus' name. We may not perform miracles like that, but when we speak the power of Jesus' name to others when presenting the gospel, do we not show we believe the miracle of salvation can happen simply by sharing God's words? Telling people how Jesus can change them is faith to believe in the miracle of changed lives.

And when Paul and Silas are beaten and arrested for telling people about Jesus, what are they empowered to do?

To sing in the midst of suffering (vv.23-25)

And notice the prisoners were listening. Why? Because who sings when they suffer? Who praises God in calamity and difficulty? Followers of Jesus do when we're walking by faith. And this same attitude also empowers us in another way -

To show compassion to our oppressors (vv.28-36)

Paul and Silas could have easily ignored the jailer who had mistreated them earlier. Instead they chose service and humility and compassion. They saved his life first by not escaping. And secondly by sharing Jesus with them. Like Lydia's household who heard the Word and got saved, they showed their belief through baptism. And then the jailer and his family are empowered to show compassion to Paul. Takes them to his house. Washes their wounds (some of which he might have been responsible for) and then feeding them. And they were all filled with joy!

And as we saw when Paul and Silas are told to leave town, we see they are empowered

To be unintimidated by force and power (vv.37-40)

You and I who know Jesus Christ as our Saviour have probably experienced all these things at different times. Trusted God's will over our plans. Prayed for people and shared the gospel believing God can do what we can't. Remained at peace and were able to praise God even when we were going through difficulties. Been filled with compassion by the Spirit of Jesus because we see people as Jesus sees them; lost and in need of the shepherd. And been calm and unthreatened even when people who think they have power over us and tried to intimidate us, were unable to.

¹⁶ *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith.*

The gospel is not something you only believed in the past for salvation and has no further relevance for your life. The gospel is the power of God (ongoing present sense) to enable us to live by faith knowing God is really in control when it looks like the world and sin is running the show. We

continually obey the teachings of the Word of God because we have believed the gospel by faith. God has made us right with Him and we no longer need to prove to the world our self-righteousness but in humility our confidence, peace and hope are found in Jesus Christ.

We who are saved have the power of Jesus' Spirit indwelling, enabling and empowering us to live by faith in obedience to the gospel that continually changes our life. Review the many ways you are empowered by God to live this gospel life out. Share the good news of Jesus in grace and confidence this week. Trust God in the midst of the trials you might be facing and let others see the peace that surpasses all understanding. They just might ask about the hope that we have. Don't let the power players and followers of the world system intimidate you. Remain hopeful. God is on the throne. Jesus' return is imminent. We are free from sin's power, the world is not. But Jesus can free them.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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