

GOSPEL / THE JAILOR

A Gospel Message by George Bates. The Meeting House. Randalstown. Co., Antrim. Northern Ireland. UK.

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READING:- ACTS 16 : 1 – 15

“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

After they were come Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us”.

I think that the Spirit of the living God has something that He wants to remind Christians about.

I wish to emphasize two main points in these 15 verses:

- 1. All believers should expect the Spirit of God to guide them, but remember that a strong impulse alone can be of the Devil.*
- 2. Everything that happened to Paul and his company here, and all that subsequently took place afterwards in Europe, was the direct result of the prayers of a few woman folk, who did not even have a building to pray in.*
- 3. (Giving visions to Apostles, forbidding them to go anywhere else – drawing like a magnet). There is no such thing as an insignificant prayer meeting.*

In verses 14 and 15, the woman had already been a worshiper of God, but her ears are opened to the Scriptures and her heart is opened to the Saviour.

Only God saves souls. Whose heart the Lord opened.

Her home is opened to the servants of God.

Has your heart been closed to Jesus by sin?

*In verse 16 we read, “**And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying**”.*

Doctor Luke, the beloved Physician, is relating this wonderful story, that we are about to hear, just the way that it happened.

He goes right back to the beginning and he remembers that they were on their way to pray.

*As we watch these PRAYER PARTNERS, beginning in prayer with the woman folk at the riverside, and continuing in prayer together; then we can see the secret of why they could say at any moment “**I being in the way the Lord led me**”, because they know the wonderful principle of truth that is clearly taught by the first four words of the Bible, “In the beginning God ...”.*

If it is God in the beginning, then it will be God the whole way through.

If it is yourself, or anyone else who starts it, then you will have to prop it up from morning till night.

So the only way to be sure that you are on the right track believer is to make sure that everything that has a beginning is God in the beginning. So keep on beginning everything in prayer.

*After a little Church or assembly was established at Philippi, Paul wrote to these very Christians and said that he was confident of this very thing, that “**He which hath begun the good work in you, will finish it (or perfect it) until the day of Jesus Christ.**” Everything that God plants grows.*

Now it is wonderful the hindrances we meet, when coming to the Mercy Seat to pray, and in verses 16 – 18 we read

*“**And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:***

The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour”.

We see A DIVINING DAMSEL, who is a demon possessed fortune teller. A poor depraved woman tormented and dominated by an evil spirit. What a sad, lonely and miserable state for any soul to be cursed with. She is not only held captive by this evil spirit, but she is a slave girl to a bunch of boys who were using her to make a fortune out of her demented state. They were living from her misfortune and misery, and they were enjoying an easy income. Like so many leeches in our land tonight.

It is a terrible thing to think of human beings crawling so low. They will do anything at all to get money. Sell them alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, ecstasy, L.S.D., crack, cannabis resin or solvents, to destroy their very brain cells and boil their blood.

They would make merchandise of your very souls. They will even sell the very bodies of other human beings and live off their brokenhearted immoral misery and shame, without ever giving a thought to the torments and miseries of hell that they themselves will suffer one day as a result of it all. You are going to reap what you have sown.

*You are a fool if you think that the Devil works for you. The serpent will strike when the charming stops. “**Be sure your sin will find you out.**” Then God will drive you away from Him, like chaff before the wind, at the Great White Throne of Judgment.*

There are lessons to learn for Christians here in these verses. Paul the Apostle did not just run at the Devil every time he noticed his activity, he knew that this evil spirit was only a foot soldier in

Satan's army. He was wondering what the commanding officers were planning, among the rulers of the darkness of this world .

*There is absolutely nothing wrong with the statement that this Fortune Teller is continually repeating in verse 17 **"These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation"**.*

You could be saying all the right things and yet, at the same time, your heart be full of the Devil.

Paul knew that he was in a battle with a subtle enemy as he sought to reach souls for Jesus Christ. The Devil was standing ready to resist the spread of the glorious Gospel from getting into Europe.

So after praying for wisdom and help from God about it for many days, he decides to do what he could have done at the very beginning, he casts the evil spirit out. The slave girl is delivered and returned to normality.

Paul expected a Satanic reaction, but he had concluded that God must have some purpose in allowing this to occur.

*The servant of God does not need the enemy to advertise his ministry.
The Spirit of Python can flatter men of God, in order to make it look like they are in fellowship with them, to other people.*

When the worldling unites themselves to Christian service, then the testimony is ruined.

*Now watch in **verses 19 – 24** what I have called **THE MENACING MASTERS**.*

***"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,
And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,
And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.
And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.
And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:
Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks"**.*

Notice the cunning of these characters, for they are suddenly pretending to be public spirited, fine upright citizens, interested only in the welfare of the community.

They had not concern about anybody but their own selfish ends. These hypocrites do not want to see this poor soul set gloriously free, they want the Demon back into her again. They have lost a great money spinner. So they are out to get their own back on these Christians.

*They don't mind pretending they are doing it for a good cause.
But I remind you that Paul and Silas are only flesh and blood like ourselves, and they have done no wrong. Yet they are willing by suffering for Jesus' sake (and this is something that Christians are sometimes called to do).*

THE HUMILIATION OF THE STRIPPING.

Verse 22 – The Magistrates tore off their clothes.

THE HYPOCRISY OF THE SENTENCE "and commanded to beat them."

They had to go through all this in their experience, even though they have not had a fair trial.

THE HARDNESS OF THE SCOURGING

Verse 23 – “They laid many stripes upon them”.

THE HEART BREAK OF THE STOCKS

Feet locked into the rough wood.

Now why are they enduring this?

Why do they need their feet locked in?

Because the big rough pagan Jailor got a warning to make sure that they do not escape or else.

Verse 23 “Charging the jailor to keep them safely”.

And he knew well what the consequences would be if they got away. He would be skinned alive. It is all the same to this brute anyway. He has no problem at all lashing lumps of raw flesh out of their backs and shoulders, and then dragging them down into a filthy dungeon, to lock their feet in the stocks and then sitting down for a quiet night’s sleep, without a care in the world.

He didn’t need a tablet or a hot drink to get him over to sleep before midnight. He is out for the count like a baby (as the clock strikes twelve).

Now as the Jailor snored and Paul and Silas suffered in the inner prison, I am positively sure that the Devil really rubbed salt into their wounds with his discouragements.

Where is your God in all this?

On your way to a Prayer meeting were you?

Casting out demons were you?

Well just look where it has got you!

As Paul and Silas sat there, in the stocks, in the inner prison in the total midnight darkness, they could feel the pain of their torn flesh and the heat of their own blood flowing down their backs, as they sat in the filth of previous prisoners and listened to the rats scurrying about in the pitch black dungeon.

Verse 25

“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them”.

*It is the darkest hour (midnight),
in the darkest place (the inner prison),
in their darkest experience.*

*But they didn’t cry, they didn’t complain, they didn’t charge God foolishly.
They prayed, and sang praises unto God.*

After all, that is what they had set out to do in the first place, before this trouble all began, and it was just as easy to pray here, as it was at the river.

*What do you think that they felt like doing?
They were bound to be emotionally upset.
They could not possibly have felt like praising God.*

*But, they were following the footsteps of Christ, who had left them an example **“For when He was reviled, He reviled not again when He suffered, He threatened not.”***

They were accepting this Cross as being from God for them, for they knew that their times and experiences were in His control. There was a power within them that enabled them to praise the Lord in their deepest trial, to rise above their circumstances.

Christian remember, if you pray like Jeremiah in the dungeon when the praying is the hardest, then you will find that the answers are the greatest.

***“Call unto me and I will answer thee and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knoweth not”.** Jeremiah was up to his neck in filth.*

*Who do you think that they were praying for?
The prisoners? The Jailor?*

Why do you think that they were praising God?

They knew that in His Divine providence, He had brought them here, and they knew the answer was on the way. And remember, the prisoners were listening, they could hear what was happening.

When Christians Praise the Lord in their tribulations, they bring blessing into their own souls, and salvation and deliverance to the Devil's captives who are listening and watching.

*Verse 26, **“And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed”.***

***THE JAILHOUSE ROCKED!** (And Elvis was not even born yet! ...Sorry for that.)*

Now it's just here, at this moment, that God comes into the picture.

A PROVIDENTIAL PHENOMENON OCCURS.

A great earthquake suddenly rips through the city and everyone's bands were loosed.

You see, even when men have done their worst, God is still on the Throne of the Universe. Our God is able to deliver His people.

Jesus, Our Risen Lord, is at work here.

Revelation chapter 3 verses 7 - 8

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name”.

There are no doors that He cannot open.

There are no chains that He cannot undo.

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”.

Dear unsaved soul, Jesus has come to bring you out of the prison house of sin's bondage.

“Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus I come to thee”.

I wonder if you can identify yourself with this Jailor in some way?

Verse 27

“And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled”.

There is A POSITIVE DEADLINE here.

The Jailor has been asleep to his danger up until this point, but God has been merciful and did not allow him to die in his sleep and drop into hell. (That could have happened to you and you know it).

And now he is having A RUDE AWAKENING.

He is in a state of shock.

Has something devastating come crashing into your life recently?

Have you been badly shaken?

Has death come very near?

Are you more aware of the brevity of life?

The Jailor immediately sums up the situation and decides that it would be better to die quickly, at his own hand, than face the slow death ahead of him for sleeping on duty and losing the prisoners.

Just think of the split second timing involved here, as he puts the handle of his sword against the wall and is about to plunge into it, he has only seconds to spare and he will be in the everlasting burnings of Hell forever.

There is no tomorrow in this man's life.

If God is going to save him, it is now, or never.

There is an obvious urgency.

Are you in wits end corner?

Have you no way left to turn?

Are you suicidal?

Have you run out of road?

Does death seem to be the best option?

Don't jump to wrong conclusions.

Things are not as impossible as they seem.

Do it God's way and He will move Heaven and earth to save and deliver you.

Do it your own way and your soul will be lost in Hell forever.

You must do it God's way now. Do not hesitate.

“Behold now is the accepted time”.

“Behold now is the day of salvation”.

“Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”.

“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near”.

Some might think I am just scare-mongering, but I have seen the evidence of God's warning so often.

I am sure that the good news that the messenger's loud voice brought was sweet to his ears.

*Paul is in the deeper darkness and can see the Jailor, although he cannot see him.
It was a merciful voice that he heard, it was a forgiving heart that cried out.*

Paul could have let him die like a dog for whipping him, but Paul was merciful because Christ had forgiven him.

But God had been even more merciful to him again, by keeping the freed prisoners in a state of shock so that they didn't break out.

*Can you recall A PAST DELIVERANCE in your experience?
Has God been gracious and merciful to you in some way?*

I believe that GOD wants to work a miraculous deliverance for you, if you will stop holding back and come and repent of your sins, and trust Him wholly and make your stand for Jesus, as a soldier of the cross.

*I think you can see THE POSITIVE DEADLINE, there is no time to waste.
I think you can see THE PAST DELIVERANCE, God saved his skin and his job.*

But there is a need for A PERSONAL DECISION.

Verses 29 – 31

*“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,
And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?
And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”.*

His REALIZATION - it is possible that you, like him, already know that you are lost.

*His REQUEST - what must I do to be saved?
Is that your request tonight?*

*His REQUIREMENT - believe on the Lord.
Saved – not live a better life.
A faith that trusts God's son.*

*The Jailor was wide awake now.
He had seen the power of God.
He had witnessed the mercy of God.
He feared the wrath and judgement of God.
Trembling, he sought the forgiveness of God.
He trusted the word and work of the Son of God.*

In Verses 32 –34 He obeyed the Will of God.

There is A PUBLIC DECLARATION of his new found faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord in his actions.

Do not be ashamed of the One who bled and died for your sins, to save your soul at Calvary.

Go right 'out and out' for the Saviour, and you will influence the eternal destinies of your family and your friends.

Allow me to ask a question concerning this passage that the Holy Spirit has inspired Luke to record, so that thousands of souls have been led to the Saviour through it, down through the Church age.

Where is the Cross in all this?

The story has so obviously been recorded for us to preach the Gospel from, but where is the Cross?

"For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us which are saved it is the power of GOD". 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 18

The Cross is hidden in the story in PICTURE PARALLELS.

Our Wonderful Saviour willingly left His home in Heaven because of the sinners' cry for salvation and help (not only in Macedonia), but all over the world.

"The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

He could not turn to the left or the right From the Will of God for His life either; He set His face to go to Jerusalem.

"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair I hid not my face from shame and spitting". Isaiah chapter 50 verse 6

There was a Satanic reaction whenever He went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the Devil.

He was taken by "wicked hands" and thrown into the low dungeon.

They gave Him a mock trial, they stripped Him naked on Gabbatha's pavement.

They scourged His back.

His hands and feet were nailed, not just put into stocks.

He was held by wooden beams.

When they lifted that Cross and dropped it into the socket, He rejoiced to do God, the Father's Will.

*He prayed for the prisoners **"Father forgive them"**.*

He didn't only bleed, but He died, having finished the work.

He went down into the blackness of darkness to the inner prison of Hell.

He loosed the captives. There was an earthquake.

He rose again and ascended up on High and led captivity captive and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High.

I know a river where prayer is won't to be made.

The river of previous blood, running down the Cross of sacrifice.

In the darkest hour of history. In the darkest experience of humanity.

In the darkest place He hanged alone and bore away our sins in His own body on the tree.

I used illustration of Robert the Bruce being chased by his own hounds, into the stream and they could not follow. It is the same with the blood of Jesus.

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