

The Gospel Goes Out (Acts 16:5-40)

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Preacher: Michael Drake

[0 : 00] If you don't have a Bible with you, we've got some up at the front, so feel free to just grab it from the front. But yeah, Eden can come up and read this passage, and then Michael will come and explain it to us.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony.

[1 : 14] We remained in the city some days. 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 woman who had come together.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thetira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptised, 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. 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.

She followed Paul and us, crying out, These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation. And this she kept doing for many days.

[2 : 19] Paul, having become greatly annoyed, 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.

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. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city.

They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice. The crowd joined in in attacking them, and the magistrates tore their garments off them, and gave orders to beat them with rods.

And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying, and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. And suddenly, there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken.

[3 : 29] And immediately, all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

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.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here. And the jailer called for light, and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Then he brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.

And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house. 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.

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. But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, Let those men go.

[4 : 35] And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore, come out now, and go in peace. But Paul said to them, They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison.

And do they now throw us out secretly? No. Let them come themselves, and take us out. The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens.

So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out, and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison, and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them, and departed.

Yeah, that's lovely. Thank you. Thank you, Aura Eden. What a fantastic passage.

If they put that on Netflix, and changed Paul's name to Jason Bourne, you'd be hooked, wouldn't you?

[5 : 43] Washed up on a foreign shore, in a city he'd never been to. At first, he's happily received. Then he meets evil itself, walking on two legs. There's a riot.

There's no car chase. But he finishes up in prison, hopelessly bound in stocks. There's a miraculous escape. Yeah.

It would make good Netflix, wouldn't it? But God has given us his word, in written and spoken form. And so we have to shift our mind now, and our hearts, to think this is God's word.

It's not entertainment. It is exciting. But it's his word for us. So let's pray as we turn to it. Father, we thank you. We thank you for the story that's unfolding as this church works its way through this book of Acts.

And we pray that you would help us now to have hearts and minds shaped by your spirit, that we might worship you even as we hear this word, and that our lives might be transformed to be like Christ, to make Christ known, and to be those who together, as the church, the people of God, worship and serve you in this world until Christ returns.

[7 : 07] And we ask that in his name. Amen. Amen. You know, there's a significant change takes place in chapter 16.

You ended last week with the fact that they were there building up the churches just as they had been called to do back in chapter 14. They'd been sent up to pastor these churches, to care for them.

And that's what they're doing. But there's a shift from strengthening churches to a new mission.

There's a shift from location, of location, from Asia, across the Aegean Sea, to Europe.

This is the first time in the nearly 20 years since Jesus died that the gospel comes to Europe. From Asia.

Okay, it's a Roman Asia. It's not the real Asia, is it? But it's the Roman Asia, Turkey, and across to Greece, Europe. I think it's ironic that as the next few chapters unfold, you will discover that the Europeans get upset that they see this Asian religion colonising their cultures.

[8 : 24] I'll just leave that one with you. You can think about that. But what's happening here? Well, in the first episode, verses 6 through to 10, the Holy Spirit sends these believers to proclaim the gospel, concluding, in verse 10, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So this is Luke writing. Luke now seems to have joined the group. There's Timothy there, and there's Paul, and there's a bunch of others. But do you see what's happened?

They have been trying to go up to different churches, and they've been stopped. What would be your reaction? I was talking to someone who's part of student life.

You have a mission. You go there, and you just can't even get to the people. What would you think?

They saw God's hand in it. You see, as we read there, God prevented them from going.

God was in control. God was ruling. Look at verses 6 and 7. It's stressed twice that God was in these circumstances. Do you see God in your circumstances?

[9 : 38] Do you recognise the hand of God shaping the very world in which you live? Because that is the world in which he rules.

Your life, your world, this world. And you know, even though they had a sign, they didn't depend on the sign.

Look at what happens. Paul has this vision. Now, if someone here in the church says, oh, I've had this vision. This is where we should go. What are you going to do with it? I can see.

Ooh. Well, 1 Thessalonians 5.19 tells us to test the spirits. And that's what we see them doing.

They were in a place to start with where they were already walking with God, doing what he wanted to do.

They'd gone up to these churches, pastoring them, because that's where God had called them to be. They were walking faithfully. They weren't sitting around umming. Do you know what umming is?

[10 : 37] Um, waiting for something to happen. No, they weren't doing that. They were living for Christ. But then notice what else it says. In verse 10, they concluded.

Do you get that? They looked at the evidence. They looked at the vision. They looked at the word of God they knew. And they weighed it up and they made a judgment.

They concluded. They tested the spirits to see what they should be doing. And so they actually consulted the leadership.

You heard earlier from Pastor William that I work with students. So often students will bowl up, oh, God's called me to this ministry. Yeah, great. That's exciting.

What does your church say about it? Oh, I don't know. Why are you telling me? I want you to pray for me. Oh, yeah. And pay for me?

[11 : 34] And I'm saying, wait a minute. If God has called you, what does the leadership of your church have to say about this?

That's what Paul, Paul the apostle, is doing here. He's consulting with the team and saying, what does it seem God wants us to do? And together they conclude that.

And so we see that Jesus is guiding them by his spirit into this mission. And then in verses 11 through to 34, the spirit uses believers to bring people to Jesus.

This is one of the happiest little missionary stories you could come across. Lydia, the first of the three big characters we're going to meet in this story, an immigrant businesswoman.

She's actually from Asia. Yeah, again, it's that Roman Asia, but never mind. She's from Asia. She's crossed across the Aegean Sea. She's now there. She's probably got a work visa.

[12 : 40] We hope so, because she's working. She's probably got a resident visa. She's unlikely to have citizenship because the Roman colony of Philippi was very, very precious about its citizenship.

They had been awarded nearly 100 years earlier a special quality of citizenship. And so Luke here describes it as a Roman colony.

There's about 15,000 people here. This is the year 49 AD, probably, round about then. About 15,000 people. Most of them Roman soldiers. They're there to guard the border.

But Lydia, this businesswoman, this dyer of purple. Now, purple cloth was precious.

And she was a specialist. She was part of the guild. She was a leader in the business association there. Respected. Rich. Because she's got a house big enough to take the whole mission team.

[13 : 42] wealthy. Influential. But a believer in God. And she is found down by the riverside. Now, it's not like you'd go out here and sit down there by the mudflats.

It was probably a place of prayer, a room or a house or somewhere where they gathered. And Paul and his team know that they're there and they go looking for them and they meet them together. And they talk about the gospel. And then there's the simple things that the Lord opened Lydia's heart. Isn't that wonderful? God just moved.

Now, I don't know what Paul said because over and over again you're going to find in these next few chapters we don't get any more sermons listed. They're a couple and they're brilliant, of course. But they're also instructive for us. But all we told is they talked about Jesus. And there's a little shift coming here if you watch carefully over the next few chapters we're not talking to non-Jews.

[14:45] They stop talking about the Messiah. They stop talking about the Christ. They stop even quoting from the Old Testament. And they start talking about Jesus, the Creator, the Lord, the one all in every country should serve because he is the God of every nation.

and the Lord opens her heart and Lydia says, I believe. I want to be baptised. Man, she gets on with it.

She's baptised and then the whole household is baptised with her and the implication is that they are believers. It doesn't say so here but the implication of being baptised and being marked look, I don't know what mark you could have.

Oh, let's take a gang patch. You start wearing a gang patch, you have marked yourself out as belonging to a different group, haven't you?

Baptism marked them out as belonging to Jesus. And notice the language, I'm saying belonging to Jesus, not to the Jewish Christ but to Jesus. He is the Jewish Christ, of course.

[16:01] But there's that emphasis. She is now marked out as a disciple, a follower of Jesus. What does she do? She immediately starts to live like one.

She implores the mission team to come home and be fed and be cared for. She loves the people of God because that is what she is called to do. Do you remember in John 13, 35, Jesus says that's how people will know you are my disciples by the love you show to one another.

John 1, sorry, 1 John in verse 3. Exactly the same message. To be Jesus followers is to be lovers of Jesus' people. And that's what marks Lydia out.

And so we see Jesus saves, saves through the work of the Spirit. The Spirit opened her heart. And then from verse 16 on, we see this strange incident with the possessed girl.

The Holy Spirit uses a believer's authority to turn a girl to Jesus. The slave is a spirit medium, but at the name of Jesus the evil spirit leaves.

[17:18] And let's backtrack a little bit. It tells us that Paul was annoyed. Now, I get annoyed. I can see from your look some of you get annoyed.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to say, annoyance be gone? But you see, we're getting the wrong picture there. Paul is not annoyed because it's getting in his way.

The old King James Version says he was grieved. That's getting closer to it. You see, Paul was troubled that this was not what they were there for.

This witness from this evil spirit that they were servants of the living God was in fact somehow against the message.

And he's grieved that this goes on and on, so he brings it to a stop. Why? Well, the witness of wicked evil spirits is never good.

[18:21] Now, let's get this. Let's start in Genesis 3. Satan comes along and he says, has God really said? Oh, yes, God really did say. Will you really die?

Ask Adam if you can meet him. Did he die? Yes, he really died. But you see, the way even the word of God is used by evil spirits. And so we see in Mark 1, 31, Jesus won't let the evil spirits speak.

He won't let them speak because even if they say what sounds true, they are twisting it and perverting it to wickedness. And then the true nature of evil spirits is displayed, isn't it?

Here is this poor slave girl who's possessed by a spirit. It cannot be a pleasant experience. And she is liberated from it.

And oh, joy of joys, wouldn't you think they'd be so excited? No. They've lost their money. Their whole attitude is selfishness. And wickedness.

[19:35] And that highlights the nature of this sort of spiritual guidance. To go to evil spirits, or to go to any spirits, even if you don't think they're evil, to go to anyone except the Holy Spirit for guidance, is to give yourself over to deceit, to wickedness, and to loss.

And then there's the deliverance of this slave girl. At the name of Jesus, Jesus, there are people who think that the name of Jesus is some sort of formula.

So you have to get ready and say, at the name of Jesus, and it's going to happen? And then if it doesn't happen, at the name of Jesus, it's blasphemous.

It's wicked. Why? Why? Because it is not a magic formula. To say at the name of Jesus is to say, I am here as his representative, on his authority, pleading with him to act.

And so when we pray, when we say at the name of Jesus, amen, we're not using that as some formula that's magic, but quite the opposite, saying Jesus is the one who can hear and make it possible for us to have our prayers answered.

[20 : 54] And the implication of this deliverance was, in fact, that she was not just delivered from an evil spirit, but came to know Jesus. Why do I say that?

Well, the narrative isn't first and foremost about the details of someone's salvation. We don't see much detail about any of these three characters, but you remember back in Luke 8 and verse 7 and then again in Luke 11 and 24, Jesus makes the point that you don't take an evil spirit out and leave the house vacant.

And the point he's making is if God takes a spirit of wickedness out of somebody, he does not abandon them to be repossessed.

Instead, he gives them the Holy Spirit. Now, I'm guessing a little bit here because the text doesn't tell us, but I'm saying I think you can be pretty confident that this girl, in her deliverance, was brought to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus as her Saviour and King.

And now we move on. Verses 9 through 34. The Holy Spirit, and it's a long story, isn't it? We're not going to look at every detail of it, but the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 17] Now, who's he saved? He saved a business woman, an immigrant, a foreigner. He saved a poor little slave girl.

And now we're going to see God's hand on a civil servant, a citizen of Philippi. A jailer believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and is saved.

First of all, let's look at what Jesus does with Paul's mission team. Right? He falsely accuses them. No, no, Jesus doesn't.

But he has them falsely accused. Remember, Jesus is Lord. He's in control. He has them falsely accused. He has the whole city turned against him. This is a great mission trip.

Go for it, guys. Then they're beaten. And then they're put in prison. And then their legs are held in stocks. And, wait a minute, they sing.

[23 : 32] And they praise God. Wrongly accused, done, done, done, done, done, done, done, done, done, done, done, done. But Paul wrote to the Thessalonians this, rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

and then he's going to write later in a few years back to the Philippians. You read this in chapter 3 of the book of Philippians. In verse 10, he's going to say, I am longing to know fellowship with Christ's sufferings.

Do you think the people at Philippi knew what he was talking about? Of course they did. Because they had seen him suffer. They knew that their church was founded on such suffering.

And yet here is Paul praying again, I want to know more of the fellowship of his sufferings. Has that been your prayer this week? We'll look at that again in a minute.

And then the earthquake. Who rules? Who's in control? Do you remember a couple of times towards the end of Jesus' life, there was an earthquake or two at the cross?

[24 : 50] As he died, there was an earthquake. And then as he rose, there was an earthquake. And now, as God opens the jail to bring the gospel to Europe, there's an earthquake.

God is in control. And Jesus gives joy in the midst of suffering and victory by his Holy Spirit. But let's look too at the jailer and the family through suffering.

The jailer sees this, he's going to kill himself. Of course he is. The Roman penalty for letting prisoners escape was execution.

Better he kill himself than he wait for the horrible execution. salvation. But Paul says, no, don't kill yourself, we're still here. And he says, what must I do to be saved?

Now, what does he mean by that? Here is a man who has apparently no prior knowledge of the gospel? It might be he's simply saying, how can I escape the execution?

[25 : 57] What can I do? He isn't even sure, I don't think, what salvation is about. He just says, I need to be saved. And you know, some of you will be like that today.

Some of you who do not know Jesus won't know even what you can be saved from or what it's about. And yet, this jailer just says, what must I do to be saved?

And the answer is, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Do you notice something else? When he's saved, he has joy because he knows God. Look at verse 34. he has joy because he knows God.

But I thought he just came to Jesus. Yes, Jesus is God. It's absolutely embedded in the text there for us. Jesus is God.

[27 : 00] And coming to know Jesus is coming to know God, the only God. If we go back and look at the slave girl, God.

What was she twisting in her prophecy? Well, she was saying that they are witnesses of the Most High God.

Think about that for a minute, especially those of you who come from cultures where there are lots of gods. witnesses. She's not saying they are witnesses of God. She's saying she's witnesses of one of the gods.

In fact, in the original language, when it says, and they're showing you the way to be saved, there's no article there. Now, I'm sure that you all had to study grammar.

Right? And English has a definite article, the, and an indefinite article, ah, and it's not there. And so in the original language, she's saying, they are showing you way to be saved.

[28 : 15] And it doesn't make good English, so we have to put an article there. And the article used usually is the definite article, the way to be saved, because later in Acts, the Christian faith is called the way.

And so it's natural to put the way. But I suspect she was more likely implying, without using any article at all, a way to be saved.

She just fits there. So it's all about all these different gods and a way to be saved. But for this man, he sees that there is one way to be saved, and there is only one God, and he comes to know him. And his whole household with him believe. This time it's spelled out for us. We don't have to guess what's happening with this household. They believe and they are baptized, and then what happens?

He shows his love to them. He takes them, cleans their wounds, feeds them, looks after them. He shows the love that is the sign of being a follower of Jesus.

[29 : 25] And so we see the Holy Spirit at work in him to give new life. life. And then as we move down to verse 33, Paul and the mission team go to encourage the churches.

Why didn't they actually raise this bit about the fact that they were Romans when they were being beaten up? You get the point, don't you? they were beaten illegally. And all they had to say was, we're Roman citizens, and it would have stopped.

Because they couldn't beat Roman citizens without a trial. They couldn't jail them without a trial. But it was happening. Why didn't they do it then? Why do they now turn around and say, oh, we're Roman citizens?

Oh, boy, aren't the authorities in strife now? Are they doing that to humiliate them? I want to suggest to you that there's a very good reason why they didn't do it.

And again, we find the clue in Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 3, verse 20, where he says, our citizenship is where? In heaven.

[30 : 41] Yes, our citizenship is in heaven. And so he wasn't there when he was beaten up. It wasn't of any concern to him whether he had civil rights or not. He wasn't there to defend the law.

He wasn't there to say, you can't do this to me, because that would distract from the gospel. He wasn't claiming Roman citizenship. He was claiming heavenly citizenship and a heavenly message. So why does he do it now?

Well, look what happens. The authorities now identify this little infant church was the one who had such power that he could be freed by an earthquake from the heart of a Roman prison?

Do you think that now this church is a little bit more secure and a little bit more safe and a little bit more cared for? Exactly. And so Paul and the apostles and the mission team go to the church.

Listen to this, will you? Imagine yourself, you've been locked in prison. You've been beaten first. You might have stopped. I won't name any towns around New Zealand, but you can imagine a town where you might stop for a picnic and say, I'm not quite sure.

[31 : 55] Oh, no. Here they come. They beat you up. They lock you up. And then in the morning they come to you and say, all right, go. There's the road to Thessalonica.

Take off. What do you do? Don't you? So Paul and the team, they get up, they say, thank you, and they head down the road and then they take a left and another left and they finish up still in the city with Lydia and the church.

Why? Because they are there to encourage them. 1 Thessalonians 5.11, the task of the church is to build one another up, to edify one another, to care for one another.

And that's what they do. And then they go on their way. And so Jesus builds his church through the work of the Holy Spirit. And it's the same Holy Spirit who is at work here today, in us, in Pakaranga Chinese Baptist Church.

That same Holy Spirit. And so I want to ask you, how are you responding to that? How are you responding to the work of the Holy Spirit, the call of the Holy Spirit on your life?

[33 : 10] But before I do, I want you to notice a theme that we haven't mentioned. All the way through the story, there is cost. Even before we got there, poor Timothy, that was cost.

That was embarrassment, pain, all for the sake of preaching the gospel to the Jews, and now here he is preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Then there's Lydia, who as a wealthy businesswoman in the heart of the city, already isolated because she's praying with the Jews, now is wearing the mark of baptism for Christ.

She's marked out to suffer. And then there's the slave girl. I'm quite sure she wasn't able to go home that night. She suffered.

And then there's the jailer. What's he going to say? Guys, God sent an earthquake and the prisoners have gone. It may well be he did not join the church for very long.

We don't know. But there was an enormous cost because he was saying, I was a Roman citizen.

Now I'm a citizen of heaven. It's a massive shift.

[34 : 31] There is a cost to following Jesus. Jesus put it this way, in Luke 9.23. Whoever wants to be my disciple must take up their cross daily and follow me.

And what does it mean to take up your cross daily? Well, lots of people will tell you, oh, it's the arthritis, it's the spouse, it's the children. Well, look, we can laugh, but it's true.

Look, I've got arthritis and, man, it can be hard to live with. But as so often happens in the Bible, the text gives us the answer.

Did you notice I missed out some words? Let me read the whole text. Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

To be Christ's disciple is going to cost you. It's going to cost you everything that you treasure. You have to deny yourself.

[35 : 35] Now, the reality is, in the grace of Christ, he puts a whole lot there that's a lot better. I actually love life. I'm getting old and people sometimes say, what's it like getting old?

I'm enjoying it. Because every day I know God better and I see more of his creation and yeah, there's a whole lot of stuff I don't enjoy. But there's something better, isn't there?

There is heaven. Who wouldn't give up everything for heaven? And the answer is, most of the people out there.

Perhaps some of you. Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 9, 24. Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. That's you.

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. good. That's God speaking. It's certain. But whoever loses their life for me will save it.

[36 : 36] What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very self? And so I want to ask you who are not believers in Jesus here today, what will you hang on to so that you can enjoy eternity in hell?

It gets to me. Sorry, but it does. Because here is a saviour who says, believe and be saved. And I fear that some of you will walk out of here tonight and say, not for me.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. And for those of you who do know Jesus as saviour and friend and companion, how will you respond?

Jesus is recorded as saying this in Luke. I keep going to Luke because I think Acts is properly called Luke 2.

Right? The gospel is Luke 1. This is Luke 2. He writes this in Luke 9. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

[38 : 07] And Jesus replied, the foxes have dens, the birds have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. Now, many of you know what it is to live in a strange place.

I don't think it's anywhere more strange than Auckland, to be honest. You know what it is, don't you? You're not comfortable. Priscilla is English and when we go to England, I feel at home.

But when I stop off in the States, or even worse in China, it doesn't fit, does it? Well, actually some of you it does, but you get the point, don't you?

And Jesus is saying you will have nowhere to call home. You will have nowhere where your head belongs on this earth. You will be, if you are Jesus' disciple, you will be a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth.

The words of the apostle Peter. So if you're making notes, I want you to go back now with your pencil, right to the top of the page, and everywhere it says believers, I want you to cross that out and put disciple, because we are called to be disciples.

[39 : 22] Hebrews 12, 1 and 3, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for the example of these three believers from completely different walks of life, who came to Jesus and found in him life eternal.

Excuse me. Father, we pray that you would help every one of us here to be disciples willing to take up every day the cross of denying ourselves and living and laboring for you.

And we ask that in Jesus' name. Amen.