

## I. Introduction

Good morning! Children have a deep sense of wonder and an ability to enjoy all kinds of beauty. So much of the world is fresh, new, and exciting. Unfortunately, many of us lose our capacity for joy as we grow older. We become weary from the problems of the world and the burdens of duty and obligation. But it is possible for us to regain our sense of wonder and to experience new joy when we fix our eyes upon Jesus.

It has been said that happiness depends on what happens to you. But joy does not depend on what happens to you; instead, it depends on the condition of your heart and on your choice of attitude. In today's Scripture, we will see some excellent examples of how joy overcomes our circumstances.

For the last several weeks, we have been following Paul in his second missionary journey. As we pick up the story in today's reading, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke are all in Philippi, where they are staying at the home of Lydia. Let's begin by reading **Acts 16:16-25**.



## II. Scripture Reading (Acts 16:16-25, NIV)

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

## III. Teaching

At the place of prayer by the Gangitis River, Paul shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with Lydia and she became the first known Christian in Europe. After this, Paul and his team stayed at Lydia's home. On another day, they were once again going to that same place when something unusual occurred. **Acts 16:16a, "Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future."**



This verse raises several issues; first of all, there is the issue of slavery. Slavery is a great evil that has existed throughout recorded history. Sometimes critical voices have been raised against the Scriptures, because the Bible does not directly attack and condemn the practice of slavery. But the Bible teaches that we live in a fallen world and that there are all kinds of evil in the world. In the midst of this fallen world, the Bible proclaims that every human life is of great value and that every person is precious and loved by God. Rather than forbid slavery directly, the Bible instead proclaims that all are equal in the sight of God regardless of their station in life.

**Galatians 3:28**, is particularly important, **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus ."** This verse and others like it make it clear that God does not approve the practice of



slavery. The Bible lays a foundation of human equality that makes it clear that slavery is evil and that people who accept Christ must reject the practice of slavery. Unfortunately, sometimes the church has been slow to follow through on this, but generally, around the world and across the centuries, Christians have very often stood in the front lines in the battle to eliminate every form of slavery. If we love our neighbor, we cannot accept his being made into a slave. However, in New Testament times, Christians were few in number and politically powerless. Preaching the gospel was the first priority.

The second issue raised by this Acts 16:16 is the issue of fortunetelling. The verse says, (**Acts 16:16b**), “**we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.**” In many passages, the Bible condemns all kinds of fortune-telling, astrology, mediums, and other practices that lead us away from God. As believers in the Creator God, we should recognize that all things are in His hands and we should take all of our requests and concerns to Him alone. We should not trust or rely on anything except God.

But the question of whether this girl’s ability to predict the future was real or just deception remains. Most fortune-tellers just use vague statements and deception to take people’s money. But in this case, an evil spirit was at work. From the teachings of the Bible, we know that only God can truly see the future. But we should not underestimate the evil spirits. An evil spirit cannot see the future, but it can place a prediction in the mouth of a girl and then work together with other evil spirits to try to cause the predicted event to occur. As an extreme example, under the influence of this evil spirit, this girl might predict that someone will die. And then another evil spirit might entice someone to commit murder, thus fulfilling the prediction. The Bible warns us against involvement with evil spirits with good reason. **Ephesians 6:11** urges us, “**Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.**”



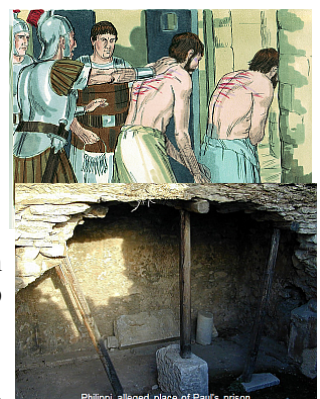
The actions of this slave girl under the influence of the evil spirit are very interesting. **Acts 16:17**, “**This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’**” This shows that even an unclean spirit can speak the truth sometimes. We don’t know why the girl was making this proclamation, but after many days, it became a major irritation to Paul.

**Acts 16:18b**, “**Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!’ At that moment the spirit left her.**” Paul’s motive in choosing to cast the spirit out at this point in time seems a bit off, but Paul knew that when he spoke in the Name of Jesus that the spirit would have to obey. We should learn this as well. If we trust in the Lord and speak in the Name of Jesus, the evil spirits will submit to us. They submit to us because we have the Holy Spirit within us and they cannot resist the Spirit of God.



The girl was set free from the influence of the unclean spirit and it is very likely that she believed in Jesus and became a disciple, although this is not recorded. What Paul did was a blessing to the girl; he set her free. But, the owners of the slave girl were angry because they had lost their source of profit. The fortune-telling business had made a lot of money for them, but Paul had taken this business away. So they seized Paul and Silas and took them to the authorities and made false accusations against them.

**Acts 16:22**, “**The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.**” There was no trial or chance for Paul and Silas to make a defense. Judgment was arbitrary and harsh. Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten severely, and thrown into prison.



The jailer placed them in the most secure part of the prison and fastened their feet in stocks. This photo shows the ruins of the place in Philippi that is thought to be the jail where Paul and Silas were imprisoned. If you had been falsely accused, stripped, severely beaten, and thrown into this cold and damp stone prison with a bunch of criminals, what would be your attitude?

The circumstances we find ourselves in certainly influence us. However,



we can still choose our attitude toward the situation. Victor Frankl was a Jewish man who was sent to a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. Everything he owned, including his family, was taken from him. The Nazis even took his name away, and gave him a number instead, number 119,104. You might think that Victor had nothing left. But in that dark place, he chose to believe in love and to find meaning in his suffering. He was a prisoner, but he chose a positive attitude. Victor Frankl expressed it this way, *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."*

I think Paul and Silas would have liked Victor Frankl. They also chose to focus on the good in their situation. And they had something truly wonderful to focus on. **Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.** Paul and Silas focused on the fact that God was with them in that place. They made the prison into a chapel, and they prayed and sang. They praised God and gave thanks to the Lord for His goodness and love.



Let's continue on and read Acts 16:26-40.

#### IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 26:26-40, NIV)

26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" 29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.

33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family. 35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

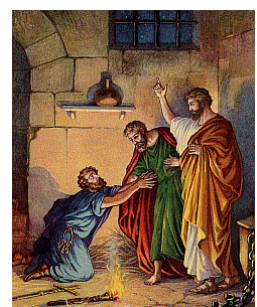
37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." 38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

#### V. Teaching

The earthquake in Philippi was no small earthquake. Not only did the doors of the prison fly open, but the chains binding the prisoners came loose. God set Paul and Silas free. All of the prisoners were actually set free, and yet not one of them ran away. I can only think that this must have been because of the powerful witness of Paul and Silas. The prisoners had all seen and heard Paul and Silas praising God, and now they stayed when they could have run for it.



In those days, the rule was that a guard or jailer who allowed his prisoners was punished by execution. When the jailer saw the prison doors open after the earthquake, he assumed that at least some of the prisoners had escaped. Rather than wait to be executed, he chose to kill himself. **Acts 16:28-29, "But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas."**





The jailer then asked a very important question. And Paul gave him the one and only true answer to his question. **Acts 16:30-31, “He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.’”** Believe and be saved. It sounds so simple, and yet for many people it is difficult. Paul’s answer is difficult because it rejects works – the jailer is not asked to do religious penance or to donate his money. It also rejects pride, because Paul’s answer demands that we trust in Jesus and not in ourselves. According to Paul, no amount of being good or doing good works is enough to earn salvation.

Believe in the Lord Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Rely on Jesus. Receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. We are not saved by what we do; we are saved by what Jesus has already done for us. Jesus did tell His disciples to become servants. But this was not so that they could somehow earn salvation; it was so they could become like Him. **Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** Jesus gave His life as a ransom for ours. We deserve the death penalty for our sins, but Jesus died in our place so that we might receive the free gift of eternal life. Believe and be saved.



**Acts 16:33-34, “At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.”** In jail, Paul and Silas found joy, because they knew that the Lord was with them. Now the Philippian jailer and his family find that same joy, the joy of the Lord.

Have you experienced the joy of knowing Jesus? If not, then I want to encourage you to make the decision to believe. If you are listening to these words, it is not by accident. I don’t think you would be listening unless God was already working in your heart and leading you to faith. And, I know that God does not leave things half-done. As Paul wrote in **Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**



**Acts 16:40, “After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.”** I bet there was a lot of rejoicing that night. I bet Lydia threw a party to celebrate Paul and Silas being released from jail and also to celebrate the new faith of the Philippian jailer. However, the missionary team did not rest on their success; they soon left to go on to other towns. But they left behind two families of baptized believers, Lydia’s family and the jailer’s family, and probably others, such as the slave girl. The church in Philippi would continue to grow as those left behind shared their faith.

## VI. Conclusion

Some years after this, Paul wrote a wonderful letter to the church at Philippi. The theme of that letter is joy. Interestingly, Paul was once again in prison and suffering persecution for the Name of Jesus when he wrote his letter to the Philippians. But he did not let his circumstances dampen his joy. Paul had learned to rejoice in the Lord Jesus, regardless of circumstances. It is my prayer that we also would learn to rejoice always.



Let’s close for today with a reading from **Philippians 4:4-8**. Listen close and you will learn some of the secrets of the joyful Christian life. **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.”**

Let’s pray.

## VII. Prayer