

Guest Preacher - Rev. RJ Campbell

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Preacher: Rev. RJ Campbell

[0 : 00] Let us now return to the portion of scripture that we read together in the Acts of the Apostles and chapter 16.

And we'll read again from verse 8. So, passing by Messiah, they went down to throw us. 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 saw to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. In this chapter of Acts 16, what we have is an account given to us of how the seed of the gospel was first planted on European soil.

The journey of Paul and Silas began really in chapter 15, in what we call Paul's second missionary journey.

[1 : 19] The second journey began from Antioch, as the first one did. But there was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, which resulted in them parting ways.

Paul took Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. And when they came to Derbe and Lystra, they met with Timothy or Timotheus, who joined with them.

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

And after they came to Isaiah, they were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. In some way of which we are not told they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the gospel in what we today call Asia.

[2 : 30] All that we know is that God, the Holy Spirit, sovereignly indicated to his servants that they were not to preach the gospel in Asia at that time.

And all we know is that there is this sovereign activity of God, the Holy Spirit forbidding the preaching of the gospel through Paul and his companions in Asia.

And this must have left them quite perplexed and confused, wondering what God's plan and purpose is. Why was God forbidding them to preach the gospel in Asia?

After all, they were following the commission of Jesus to preach the gospel to every creature. Everything to this point looks so negative for them.

But they were to learn a vital lesson, which we must all learn. And that is that in the outworking of that great commission, there is the special sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit, directing where the gospel should go and be preached through its appointed messengers.

[3 : 49] So Paul and his companions came to throw us. Now, while the direction of the Spirit in verse 6 to 8 is negative, it also becomes positive in verse 9 to 12.

We read here that 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.

Now, this vision that Paul received was not just a flash and it was over. The man that appeared in the vision stood there for a while.

And he was continually pleading, Come over into Macedonia and help us. How did Paul know that he was a Macedonian?

Well, I do not know. The Bible does not tell us. All we know is that he recognized this man who was pleading with him as a man of Macedonia.

[4 : 52] That is, a man from Greece, the southernmost part of Europe. And the result of the vision is given to us here. For we are told that when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we saw to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

It is worth noting here that up until this point, Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, Luke is not writing we, but they. So we must conclude in using the word we here, that somewhere in this part of the

narrative, that Luke joined Paul, Silas and Timothy.

And now the four of them, according to Luke's record, conclude that this vision that was given to Paul was in order to direct them to go across the sea and into the southern part of Europe, there to preach the gospel.

We are here taught by Paul and his companions that the greatest need of the Macedonians was the preaching of the gospel.

The appeal from the man that appeared in the vision was not come and preach the gospel to us, but come and help us. And yet the spontaneous response of the apostle and his companions was that the way that they would bring the most solid help to the Macedonians is to go and to preach the gospel of the grace of God to them.

[6 : 35] This is the greatest. This is the most solid help that we can give to anyone to present them with the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Paul, writing to the church at Rome, says, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ is the most profound message that will ever come to our hearing.

And our familiarity with the gospel may be taking the significance and the importance of it away from us.

But the most important thing for me and you today is that we have the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

[7 : 43] There are many, as we know, by looking around us today, seeing empty chairs, empty pews. There is, bringing before us, that there are many who is despising the gospel and rejecting the gospel.

And yet, it is the most significant and the most important thing that has ever come into our district is the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Because the core or heart of the gospel is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And that is the good news. Anything that diverts from the grace of God in Jesus Christ is not the gospel.

That is exactly what happened to the church in Galatia to whom Paul writes, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

[9 : 01] As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you receive, let him be accursed.

So that brings before us how solemn and how important and how significant. It brings before us the great privilege that is ours today to have the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ and to have that gospel preached to us.

How did they come to this conclusion that they were to preach the gospel in Macedonia? Well, there is a combination of things that led them to this conclusion.

First of all, there was the double prevention by the Holy Spirit barring their way into both Asia and Bithynia. But that in itself was not enough for them to come to this conclusion.

There was the vision which Paul knew was from God. And so he concluded that God was calling them to Macedonia in order to preach the gospel there.

[10 : 17] And what we see here is that they are obedient and willing. And now the same sovereign God causes by his favorable providence that his servants should make a quick and straight course to their destination.

They are in Troas whose sea harbored faced west to Macedonia. So we read that. Setting sail from Troas we made a direct voyage to Samothrace and the following day to Neapolis and from there to Philippi which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

Having come to that conclusion that the Lord was calling them to go and preach the gospel in Macedonia they do not delay. They make up no excuses but was obedient and willing to fulfill their calling.

A ship was available. They had room in the ship for four passengers and we are told that the winds were favorable for they made a straight course and completed the journey of 150 miles and they

completed that journey in two days.

That did not always happen as we come to chapter 20 of the Acts. It took five days on their return. They came to Neapolis and made their ten mile walk to Philippi which we are told is the chief city of that part of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

[11 : 54] Philippi was given its name by Philip of Macedon the father of Alexander the Great and for two centuries it was a Greek colony but it became part of the Roman Empire and eventually it was made a Roman colony where many of the Roman veterans would come to settle.

This resulted that the people considered themselves to be Romans rather than Macedonians. We are told that Philippi was modeled after the city of Rome so it had Roman arches and bathhouses and temples which dominated the city.

Latin was the official language and although the Greek gods had their temples emperor worship was the most prominent in the city of Philippi.

And we are told here that Paul and his companions were in that city certain days. and one thing that they knew as they walked and waited in Philippi these certain days that they were there by the appointment of the living God.

Reminding us that and them also that the gospel did not come to Philippi by chance but was brought there by the sovereign activity of God by the sovereign activity of the spirit of God.

[13 : 29] And that assurance must have been a tremendous strength for them as they looked around the city and as we have reminded you the kind of city it was it was full of pagan influence.

There was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi for it required ten men to form a synagogue. and Luke records that 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.

I just wonder what must have been going through their mind at this time. Here they are in a pagan city a city that is full of the influence of paganism.

There is no synagogue and the only place where they are through devotions to God is held by a group of women down by the riverside.

What must have given them strength is that they knew that they were there by divine appointment. and it is precisely in the same way that all our gospel endeavours ought to be undertaken in complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit to lead us and although we do not look to him to give us wisdom we can trust that by the word and spirit and by his providences that he will choose and open doors for us which will result in us being in the place of his appointment.

[15 : 22] We see this from the guidance of the word and the Holy Spirit in bringing the gospel to Philippi to this heathen city to this pagan city the gospel was brought and through that the gospel was brought into Europe.

We are always to be dependent upon the Spirit of God for the word tells us Jesus said without me you can do nothing.

We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God because it is the Spirit that quickens the flesh profiteth nothing.

So as we proclaim the gospel we are depending upon the Spirit to apply that gospel to the hearts of the people.

And here we find Paul and his companions and they are in a pagan city and they have been put there by divine appointment and they've been told and commissioned to preach the gospel there to a people that is steeped in paganism.

[16 : 36] And what was their encouragement? It was this, that they were depending upon the Holy Spirit to take the gospel, to take God's word and to apply it to the hearts of the people, to the hearts of sinners.

And every preacher of the gospel still stands on that same foundation that as we preach the gospel, as we give the good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we are depending upon the Spirit to apply that message to the hearts of sinners.

Luke also brings before us how the mighty power of the Holy Spirit made the gospel effective at Philippi. He describes for us here three conversions that took place in this city.

There is first of all the conversion of a woman named Lydia. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Tyathera, 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. The first convert in the city of Philippi was a Gentile woman from Tyathera.

[18 : 04] She was a dealer in purple cloth. The region from which she came was famous for its textiles and for its purple dye.

She was a woman who worshiped God. was a Christian woman from the native city and she attached herself to the religion of the Jews.

She saw something in the teaching of the Old Testament that attracted her and caused her to turn it back upon all her native pagan religion. You would think that a person who is a worshipper of God, who is seeking after truth, when such a person would hear the truth, would immediately embrace the gospel, that there would be an immediate favorable response to the gospel.

But it is interesting that in the case of Lydia, who seems to be the most natural and likely disciple, that Luke says in language that cannot be misunderstood, it was the Lord himself who opened her heart so that she attended to the things spoken by Paul.

That enforces, does it not, what we have already said this morning, how dependent we are upon the Holy Spirit to take the word, to take the gospel and to apply it to the hearts of our people.

[19 : 41] The Lord himself opened her heart so that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul. And the word here for opened is the same word as used when Jesus said to the deaf man, be opened and his ears were opened.

The same power that made a deaf man ears to hear so that he could hear sounds that never registered with him before. It is the same power that moved in the heart of Lydia so the gospel which fell on the outward ear now opened the door of her heart to hear the gospel.

It opened the door of her understanding to the gospel so that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. This was the sovereign activity of the Spirit of God.

There are many who can share that experience today, who may for many years have been under gospel preaching and yet their ears were not opened to the gospel until one day.

And one day the Lord opened their ears so that they gave attention to the things that were spoken in the gospel. You may be one of those people yourself.

[21 : 06] You may recall days when you came here and sat under the gospel and yet you did not hear the gospel. And then suddenly one day the gospel attracted you.

You heard something. It was new to you. It was the same message that had been preached to you for years but on this certain day it became new to you. And it was the activity of the Spirit of God opening your understanding, your ears, your heart to the gospel.

Well, that's the situation for Lydia. The Lord opened her heart and she attended to the things spoken by Paul.

The second case was of an unnamed slave girl who was under the power of a demon and who were exploited by her owners for whom she made a lot of money by fortune telling.

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.

[22 : 17] And this she kept doing for many days. Now this demon-possessed girl was acquainted with the message of the gospel. Because day after day she would cry out, these are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation.

that should not surprise us. For reading the gospels that on one occasions that in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean devil and cried out with a loud voice saying, let us alone.

What are we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. and the man who abode in the tombs, who had been demon possessed for a long time, and as Jesus approached him, he cried out and fell down before him with a loud voicing, what have I to do with thee?

Jesus, thou Son of God, Most High, I beseech thee, torment me not. We are told in the Bible that the devils believe and tremble.

But this slave girl, all she can do under the power of that demon is taunt and mock the servants of God, though she knows who they are. And though she acknowledges what the message is, she is still outside the influence of that message.

[23 : 43] Until we read, 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. The name of Jesus broke the power, of evil that had possessed this poor slave girl, and she came into the liberty of the gospel.

And the third case, the third conversion, is that of a Roman jailer. Here was a man who was so indifferent and careless that while the prisoners were listening to the singing of Paul and Silas at midnight, he is fast asleep.

Utterly indifferent to the fact that in his midst, there in the prison were the servants of God.

He is utterly indifferent to the fact that he had the privilege that was denied to the people of Asia and Bithynia. He had the privilege of having these two servants of God with him who could tell him the way of salvation.

[24 : 55] And yet, what do we find? He is asleep. Have you ever slept under the preaching of the gospel? Here's a man, and he's utterly indifferent and careless, until God sends an earthquake and shakes the prison.

For we read suddenly there was a great earthquake, so the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfurled.

And when he is wide away and realises the situation, knowing that if prisoners escape, he would pay for it with his life, he draws out his sword and he's about to plunge it into his own belly when Paul cries out with a loud voice, do not harm yourself, for we are all here.

The prison doors are open, the chains are loosed, but they are all still there. The Roman jailer called for lights and rushed in and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and this was absolutely unbelievable.

What on earth makes prisoners when the doors are open and the chains are off to stay in prison? Surely it would be expected that they would run out of prison and escape from prison, but that did not happen on this occasion.

[26 : 23] The doors were opened, the chains were loosed, and yet every prisoner stayed in his cell, every prisoner stayed in his place. The jailer could just, could hardly believe what was before his eyes.

Maybe also the jailer remembered why Paul and Silas were there in the first place. so no doubt he would have heard the report of what happened to the slave girl.

He might remember Paul and Silas praying and singing, and all this comes crashing in upon him so that this man who was indifferent and unconcerned now comes trembling and falling down before Paul and Silas.

he cries out, Sir, Sir, what must I do to be saved? Suddenly this brutal Roman jailer is wide awake to spiritual realities.

Paul and Silas answered him, Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. And he spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in the house.

[27 : 39] it would be hard to imagine a more unliked and contrasting group that makes up this group of believers in the city of Philippi.

A business woman, a slave girl, and a jailer. Lydia was from Asia, she is engaged in a very lucrative business, a very wealthy woman.

woman. The slave girl really had nothing. She owned nothing. The money that she earned as a fortune teller was straight into her master's pockets.

She couldn't sink any lower in public estimation than being a female slave.

The Roman jailer, although he had a responsible workers in the local prison, he was still subordinate official and government service. They stand worlds apart, and yet all three were changed and saved by the same gospel, and they were welcomed into the same church.

[28 : 54] These three were so different, and yet here they are together. It brings before us the unifying power of the gospel. people. At Philippi, we see both the universal appeal of the gospel.

It is to all men. It is to all people. We see that universal appeal that it could reach such a wide diversity of people, and its unifying effect on all that accepts the gospel, that it can bind people into God's family.

This is the gospel that is preached to you today, and it has the same efficacy today as it had in those years long ago in the city of Philippi.

This is good news. This is the best news that you'll ever hear. This is the most important news that you'll ever hear. The gospel, the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

That is what has been preached to you every Sabbath day. The grace of God in Jesus Christ. The undeserved favour of God presented to you through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 19] This is the good news. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Thou shalt be saved from what thy sins deserve.

Thou shalt be saved from the punishment that your sins deserve. Saved from eternal death. It saved Lydia.

It saved the slave gang. It saved the Roman jailer. And many more in more in the city of Philippi. For there at the end we read, at the end of this chapter we read, and when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Many others were converted at Philippi. Lydia, the slave girl, the Roman jailer, and many more.

[31 : 18] well, why not you? Why can your name be not added to those who are saved through the grace of God in Jesus Christ?

The gospel has come to you. The gospel is preached to you. The grace of God in Jesus Christ, our sinners, is proclaimed to you. And why will you not then be saved?

May the Lord bless our thoughts. Let us pray. eternal and ever blessed Lord, we thank thee for the gospel. We thank thee that thou hast given us the gospel, that thou hast given us the privilege to hear the gospel, to hear of the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

And we pray, O Lord, that it may please thee to apply thy word, to apply the gospel to the hearts of our people through thy Holy Spirit, and open in their hearts, that they may give attention to the gospel, that they may see their great need, that they may see the sufficiency of Christ to meet that need.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would take thy gospel, and that thou would plant it in the hearts of our people, so that they may come to repent, that they may come to take hold of the gospel, that they may come to know thy salvation, to experience thy salvation, and the joy of thy salvation.

[33 : 01] Lord, we acknowledge that we are dependent upon thee, that we wait upon thee. May thou breathe upon us with thy spirit, upon our people, upon our communities, with thy spirit, O Lord, we need thee.

We need thee to come in a day of thy power, and to bring the reality of the gospel to the hearts of our people, so that they may hear, and see, and understand.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would continue with us, forgive us for our many sins, in Jesus' name, Amen. We shall conclude by singing to the Lord's praise from Psalm 40, on page 259.

I waited for the Lord, my God, and patiently did bear. At length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear. He took me from a fearful pit and from a miry clay, and on a rock he set my feet, establishing my way to the end of the devil verse mark five.

O Lord, my God, full many are the wonders thou hast done. Thy gracious thoughts to us were far above all thoughts are gone. In order none can reckon them to thee if them declare and speak of them I would them more than can be numbered as.

[34 : 28] Psalm 40, verse 1 to 5, to the Lord's praise. I waited for the Lord, my God, and patiently did bear. I waited for the Lord, my God, and patiently did bear, and went to me.

He didn't find my voice and trying to hear.

He took me from a fearful way and from the I reclaimed and on a rock He set my feet He established in my way He put a use again in my love our water magnify many shall see it and shall fear and on the

Lord rely O blessed is the man who draws upon the Lord rely respecting not the proud the proud nor sought has turned aside to lie O Lord my God who many are the wonders the wonders thou hast done thy gracious thoughts to us work far above all thoughts are gone

God in order not God recommend to thee in them declare and speak of them I would they more and can be numbered are the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen Amen