

**Acts 16: 16-40; “By the Power of the Spirit”, Sermon #61 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In my last sermon to you from this chapter, I brought to your attention the idea that we need to see the importance of the Holy Spirit leading in missions; and not only His leading in missions but His leading in relation to each one of us witnessing for Christ to others around us. In this message I want to show you the Holy Spirit’s power in relation to overcoming trouble and opposition; those things which come to us from Satan and from people who do not want the gospel to come to them. This trouble and opposition will occasionally come to you when you are trying to preach and share the gospel. And when it comes, you should understand that it comes in order that God’s power can be demonstrated to be greater, and that you will learn to rejoice in it.

So, at this hour, I want to give you 4 ways in which God demonstrated His power to help the apostle Paul, and those with him, to overcome all the evil oppositions, and to be faithful witnesses to Christ. The Holy Spirit demonstrated His power, 1<sup>st</sup>, – In relation to the slave girl and her masters. 2<sup>nd</sup> – In relation to the apostles suffering, going to jail, and singing. 3<sup>rd</sup> – In relation to the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his household. And 4<sup>th</sup> – In relation to the release of Paul and Silas and their vindication before the magistrates.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The Holy Spirit demonstrated His power in relation to the slave girl and her masters.** (verses 16-21)

“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.” “This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” “And this she did for many days.” “But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’” “And he came out that very hour.” So, we see here that this certain slave girl who was possessed of an evil spirit, a person who could tell the future in some ways which were profitable to her masters, she was led by the Devil to think about why these 4 men had come to their city.

It was the Devil within her who gave her this suggestion to give these men some free advertising so that everyone who came within range of their voices would know why they were come, and what they were going to preach. It was indeed true that they were servants of the Most High God, and it was true that they were proclaiming the way of salvation, but it was not true that they needed this kind of advertising which actually might turn people away from hearing them, and get them in trouble with the magistrates, or others in the city. This was the Devil’s strategy. The Devil is called the prince of the power of the air in Ephesians chapter 2, and one of his greatest strategies is to attempt to prevent the gospel being received or believed.

This is actually why she was doing this. She wanted to reveal that this man Paul, and those with him, were there doing a work of proclaiming salvation in Christ. They represented the Most High God, but this God that they proclaimed, she was implying, was not the god who they worshiped in that city. She herself was a woman who was possessed with “the spirit of the Python”, as it reads in the Greek text. She was a worshiper of the god Apollo, who was also called Pythius. He had that name from his killing the serpent Typhon, or Pytho. The prophetess in the city of Delphos sat upon the golden tripods, and delivered out the oracles for this false god. Even so, this woman by the unclean spirit within her, claimed to be able to divine and to foretell things to come. And her divining was heavily in demand among the business men of the city.

But Paul was greatly annoyed by what this woman was doing. The King James says he was “being grieved” by what she was doing. He knew that he did not need someone giving them that kind of advertising. It “sore troubled him” the American Standard says. She kept this charade

up for many days, it says in verse 18. Paul was aware that she was possessed of an evil spirit. And so finally he had had enough of it. And he turned and said to the spirit – I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And the spirit came out at that very hour, it says. Her masters were upset by this because they saw that the hope of their profit by her counsel was gone. So they seized Paul and Silas, and they dragged them to the market place to the authorities. And there they proceeded to tell this falsehood to the magistrates – These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe. Now, they certainly did not know if this were true or not. They hadn't even heard Paul or Silas speak. They did not know that they were Christians; they thought that they were Jews. This is the trouble that Satan had instigated to bring upon upon these missionary men. And in this he had succeeded.

However, we must remember that it was the Risen, Living Christ who had given Paul the sign gift of being able to cast out this demon. The Holy Spirit helped Paul to demonstrate the power of God over Satan's false worshiper in this dramatic way. Having led them to this city, He would lead these men, Paul and Silas, and Timothy and Luke, through whatever the trouble that was coming to them now, to eventual victory. And he will do the same with you, dear Christian. The Holy Spirit will lead you in relation to whatever trouble or difficulty that you find yourself in when you have been faithful to oppose what is false. When you oppose false religion, and try to proclaim what is true; that is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will find that it is in God's power to override all the trouble that you come into, to turn it to a good conclusion, even when the trouble seems very bad.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – The Holy Spirit demonstrated His power in relation to the apostles suffering, going to jail, and singing.** (verses 22-25)

“Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.” “And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.” “Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fasted their feet in the stocks.” “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” So, this is one of the three times that the apostle Paul was beaten with rods. He mentions this fact in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11: 25. And in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2, verses 1 and 2 he says – “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.” “But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.”

Who was it who gave Paul this boldness and confidence in relation to suffering and conflict? It was God Himself; God the Holy Spirit. In that same passage in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11, verse 30, he says – If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. (That is, his own personal weakness and inability to bear up under suffering and to proclaim Christ by his own power. It was the Holy Spirit who was giving him the grace to do this. He says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12: 7 after the Lord did not remove his thorn in the flesh, but told him – “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”, He said – “I will rather boast of my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.” “For when am weak, then I am strong.”

He means strong through the power of Christ's Spirit working in him. God was demonstrating His power through Paul and Silas in this amazing way so that it would be a tremendous witness to His grace working with these men, and in these men. They laid many stripes on them and threw them in prison. But this was the very thing that the Holy Spirit had led them into this situation for; to be a witness to the jailor and others there in the prison. Here are Paul and Silas, no doubt hurting greatly from having been beaten with rods, their feet held

securely in the stocks. And you would think that all they would be able to do is to groan and to bemoan their awful condition. Instead we find them praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening. What a tremendous witness this was, to the power of Christ in their lives.

This same kind of power has been given to us who are just ordinary Christians; that when the Holy Spirit leads us into difficult and even painful circumstances where we will suffer for Christ because of our sharing the truth of the gospel with people who need to hear it, the Spirit will give us the grace to pray and even to sing as well. If this so, it would be good for you now, in these days where you know that you can, to learn to pray about the possibility of your suffering for Christ; that you would also pray that in such a time that the Holy Spirit would give you the grace to sing hymns to God Himself, to sustain you during that time, if you are thrown in jail. It will be good if you can memorize some hymns now in preparation for those times when you might have to go to prison for your faith. Many of the martyrs, over the generations of Church History, have been able to have the grace to sing in prison, or even sing in the fire.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – The Holy Spirit demonstrated His power in relation to the conversion of the Philippian jailor and all his household.**

Verses 26-34 say – “Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.” “And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.” “But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’” “Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.” “And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” “So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’” “Then 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 stripes.” “And immediately he and all his family were baptized.” “Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

So, here, once again, the Holy Spirit is demonstrating His mighty power in times of trouble, both in the apostle’s hearts in keeping them calm and unafraid, and able to speak; and also to this Philippian jailor and his household, in His working in their hearts. The earthquake was orchestrated by God. You will notice its specific effects. The foundations of the prison were shaken; shaken so much that immediately all of the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.” The timing of this event awakened the jailor to his need; not only to be saved from the physical effects of the earthquake, but also to be saved from his sins. He was a man who was conscious of doing his job well, but when the earthquake came, he thought that the prisoners had all escaped. He drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called out to him in a loud voice and said – Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.

What presence of mind Paul had during this earthquake, to say these words, and keep the jailor from taking his own life. The Lord may work in your heart and mind in a similar way, dear Christian, to speak to distressed sinners of their need of Christ; not to take their own life, but to trust in the Lord for salvation. The Holy Spirit had awakened this man to see his need to be saved as a result of the Holy Spirit bringing him to the realization of his desperate spiritual need. We need to remember that the Holy Spirit alone can do this good work of awakening a sinner to their need of Christ, and having you in the right place at the right time, to tell them about it.

You will notice that all Paul had to say to him were the simple words – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” He did not say – Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. He said – Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and You will be saved. Now, there is nothing wrong with saying, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for in

Him is found salvation. But the exhortation to believe on Him means that you should believe, or place your faith completely on what Christ has done for you, the sinner; believing on His finished work of redemption which He accomplished by His righteous life and sacrificial death. No doubt, Paul and those with him explained the specifics of these things to this man and those of his household. His house must have been pretty close to the prison, for he did not have any qualms about taking the messengers of the gospel to his house where they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house also.

Notice that there was an immediate response made by this man, because His heart was being changed by the Holy Spirit. The evidence of his having been saved immediately by his believing on Christ and His finished work, was his own good work of taking the Paul and Silas at that same hour of the night, and washing their stripes. In that same pond or river he himself and all his household spiritually washed away their sins by being baptized. Their baptism was the picture of what had taken place in their hearts, because it was by Christ's stripes they had been saved and cleansed and healed. And it says further that he rejoiced, having believed. A person when they first believe, can rejoice in the glory of God, the mercy of God, and the grace that they have been given in Christ.

This is because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in their heart by faith in Christ. Their whole life has been forever changed by Christ through the power and working of the Spirit. Christ has come into their life. Christ's life has become their life. Notice this terminology: Having believed. This relates to the jailor's having believed on Jesus Christ. It is related to the act of saving faith. The Holy Spirit had given the gift of regeneration to him and to all in his household as they heard the word of the Lord. And because of this mighty working, they were all saved.

Since these things happened in this way by the power of the Spirit I believe that it is entirely possible for them to take place in our day as well; a whole household of people coming to faith because they have heard the same message of salvation and responded to it by faith in Christ. God is not limited to save by few or by many. His power is not limited. And once again, I would like to say to you that it is not good to insert infant baptism into this situation. The reason that I say this is because Paul and Silas had spoken the word of the Lord to them all. They were all old enough to believe for themselves in Christ; to place their faith in Him personally. There is no mention of little children or infants who would be too young to understand. There were gospel truths which they consciously believed and received. It was only then that they were all baptized.

What a great response it was! Was the conversion of whole households something which God only did back in those days of the early Church? Well, I admit that it may be rare to hear of such a thing in our days. But let us believe that greater days will come for the Church of Jesus Christ in the future. These will be days when the Spirit will be poured out from on high. When the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest. (Isaiah 32: 15) This will happen someday, and so we should expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God, as William Carey said when he went to India.

What about the salvation of our wayward children? Yes, it is true that we may have told them the truth of God's word many times before, but let us expect that with the power of the Holy Spirit, their hearts can be opened. I believe that we must always have the hope that they can be awakened to the truth, and that God may yet be merciful to them; to cause them to be born again to a living hope. If they will receive the word of the Lord which we speak to them, the Holy Spirit can certainly awaken their hearts, He can soften them to listen carefully. He must open their hearts to respond to the things that are spoken. But these things are related for us, not so that we will only believe that God did great things for His people in that day of the

early Church, but that He also does great things in our own day, when we will pray and sing hymns of praise to God in the times of our greatest difficulties.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> – The Holy Spirit demonstrated His power in relation to the release of Paul and Silas and their vindication before the magistrates.**

Verses 35-40 say – “And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ “So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you.’ “Now therefore depart, and go in peace.” “But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison.’ “And now do they put us out secretly?” “No indeed!” “Let them come themselves and get us out.” “And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.” “Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.” “So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.”

I want you to see, in closing, how God vindicated the brethren, Paul and Silas, who had been treated spitefully and unjustly thrown in prison. He did this by the providential ordering of things by the Holy Spirit on their behalf. The Holy Spirit knew, when He had called them to their ministry that they would suffer these things. The magistrates, after hearing that Paul and Silas and the prisoners had not fled when the earthquake came and loosed every man’s chains, but they had returned to the prison after having gone to the jailor’s house and conducted the preaching and the baptisms, they thought it better to release them than to try them for any crime.

But Paul had a bone to pick with them, and that was the fact that they had been unjustly treated. They had been beaten when they were not guilty of any crime, and furthermore, they were actually Roman citizens by birth. And so when the keeper of the prison told Paul that the magistrates were going to release them and send them away without any recognition of the wrong that had been done to them, Paul said – No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out. In other words, that they would, in coming themselves, fess up to the fact that they had not done the right thing in commanding them to be beaten and jailed. And so they did come and personally asked them to depart from the city.

This was according to the working of the Holy Spirit who does see to it that justice will be done in relation to his preaching servants; that if they are mistreated, or even killed, as millions of Christians have been down through Church History, that the Triune God will keep track of all the sins and crimes committed against His people. And He will personally vindicate them, whether it is in this life, or on the Day of Judgment. See in what a wonderful way the Spirit had these things come together for Paul and Silas. After all this, they were able to go the house of Lydia, and talk with brethren and encourage them, even though they were the ones who were persecuted. Let us see how great the power of the Holy Spirit is to help each servant of Christ not to count their own life dear to themselves so that they might finish their race with joy and fulfill the ministry which He has given to them.