

series: [The Great Adventure](#)next message: [Silas](#)previous message: [Lydia](#)formats: [mp3](#), [pdf](#)

# CONFRONTATION

## *SERIES: THE GREAT ADVENTURE*

By Steve Zeisler

---

The weather in the mountains is unpredictable. A day may begin under bright sunny skies, but in a very short time the dark clouds can roll in with dramatic drops in temperature, wind, hard rain, and even lightning. You can be unexpectedly faced with difficult, even threatening, circumstances.

We're going to look at a text in Acts 16 that has that quality to it. The opposition to those who love Christ and his truth becomes a difficult and dangerous storm that blows up very quickly.

We're working our way through the book of Acts, and we're now in the early stages of Paul's second missionary journey, in the midst of the founding of the church in Philippi. The missionaries had left Antioch and had traveled for weeks over hundreds of miles, repeatedly being denied any opportunity for ministry. Eventually they got to the city of Troas, where Paul had a vision from heaven, and they realized that the door was now open: they had been called to Macedonia. They quickly traversed the Aegean Sea and early the next day continued on to Philippi, excited to see what would happen. And caught up in the story, we too are anxious to see something important happen.

### **Ending evil exploitation**

Acts 16:16-18:

**It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.**

These events took place early, perhaps midday, on the missionaries' last day in Philippi. Many dramatic events were about to take place, and at the end of this day (twenty-four hours), Paul and his companions would depart for another city. It wasn't obvious that it was going to be their last day in Philippi when they set off to the prayer meeting that morning. They had done so for many days prior, and we will see in verse 40 that there was a good, solid church now established in the city, headquartered in Lydia's house.

As the missionaries walked along, they were confronted by an evil spirit that had taken up residence in a girl. The Greek word makes clear that this was a girl, not a grown woman. This confrontation had taken place a number of times, and Paul, I believe led by the Spirit of God but also feeling "greatly annoyed," finally decided that enough was enough. So he banished the spirit from this girl's life, and in doing so set in motion a series of events.

This is one of very few accounts of an evil spirit in the book of Acts. We encounter occult practices, magicians,

and others who dabble in dark power, but seldom an evil spirit that has taken over a life. They are much more commonly mentioned, of course, in the gospels. During Jesus' earthly ministry, it seems as if the forces of hell gathered around where he was, and many more people were tormented by the presence of demons. They later became less common, apparently, or at least were not recorded in the book of Acts, except for this incident.

It is difficult in cultures like ours to talk about occult spirits. Educated people tend to be dismissive of anything that science can't measure and describe, and the world of spiritual beings is not easily subjected to scientific exploration. Evil spirits are therefore regarded as a superstition of ancient times. But I believe that is a serious mistake.

Another reason it's difficult to talk about dark spirits is that the movies and popular fiction have rendered them as walking undead flesh-eating zombies and so on. Those over-the-top special effects tend to come to mind when we read a text like this. Since we can discount the likelihood of Hollywood zombies, many folks wrongly assume the same is true of spiritual beings mentioned in the Bible.

Now, Jesus said of the devil that he is a liar and a murderer, vicious, destructive to the core. But he is not a show-off. There is no advantage to producing vampires with black capes and glowing eyes. Mere ruin of a life is what the devil is really after.

The best perspective on the incident that takes place in Philippi is to realize that this girl, who may have been just into her teens, was too innocent to have done anything to invite what had happened to her. She was a lot like the throwaway children in this country and other parts of the world whose families have perhaps treated them so badly that their lives are trashed. Often throwaway children end up addicted to drugs, prostituting themselves to get money for a habit that is tearing them apart. Pimps exploit them in the same way that the owners of this slave-girl were exploiting her tragedy to make money for themselves.

The evil spirit told the truth: Paul and his friends were serving the Most High God. But of course it was a problem to have an evil spirit telling the truth about them, because honest people would tend to reject the word of the evil spirit. This clever strategy of darkness would drive people from the truth.

Finally, we should observe that it was Paul's invoking the powerful name of Jesus Christ that ended the degradation of this girl: "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" Immediately the demon was banished from the scene.

At this point the storm gathered quickly and broke in fury upon Paul and Silas.

## **Resistance to the power of Jesus' name**

Verses 19-24:

**But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks.**

Paul invoked the authority of Jesus' name in Philippi, and the economic exploitation of this powerless girl was ended. The trafficking in occult voices was cut off. We should consider this a good thing not only because the girl was free from her torment and degradation, but because all the customers who would have come to the evil spirit for fortune-telling were no longer going to hear the wisdom of hell from her voice.

Paul and Silas directly challenged the corrupting power of greed on the part of her owners. The response was fury. The antagonism with which Paul and Silas were treated was excessive by any measure. The merchants physically seized and dragged Paul and Silas to a place of public danger. A phony trial before corrupt magistrates quickly gave way to mob reaction. Paul and Silas were given no chance to defend themselves, even though in theory this was some sort of judicial proceeding. The treatment that they received here was illegal, and it was going to come back to haunt those who visited it upon them. Their clothing was torn off to humiliate them. They were viciously beaten, and then the jailer was directed to "guard them securely," meaning to do extra damage, to treat them worse than he would ordinary prisoners. So he took these men, in agony from the beating, and made their agony greater by fitting them in stocks in a dingy inner prison, as if the outer prison weren't bad enough.

Why the excessive resistance to Paul and Silas as they invoked the power of Jesus' name? One clue is that Paul and Silas were identified as Jews. I mentioned in the last message (Discovery Paper 4767) that the Roman emperor Claudius had grown angry with Jews and banished them from Rome around this time, so that was part of what was in play here.

But these preachers were now taking the Jewish belief in one sovereign God and making it even more pointed: "There is one God, and he loves us, and has made a way for us to know him. We need not fear his judgment. We can join his cause." Growing numbers were believing what they said, and that was another problem. Roman authority insisted on order and predictability and clearly these missionaries were advocating change.

The gospel and its bearers were a threat to demons, greed, abuse and exploitation of the powerless, prejudice, corrupt courts and phony justice, mob violence, slavery, arrogant wealth, unjust governments, and sanctioned torture. From the perspective of hell, these men had to be stopped. Too much was at stake to leave them alone. They spoke with the authority to banish demons, uncover hidden sin and change hearts, break apart prejudices. They poured out healing, forgiveness, and restoration. Thus the excessive reaction: "Terrify them, silence them, imprison them, torture them...just stop them."

Perhaps there is a warning for us here. Does the Christianity that we believe and live out have enough of an edge to it? Does anybody say of us or our church community, "These people have to be stopped"? Is there enough saltiness in the salt so that it makes a difference? I think the answer is both no and yes. There are probably times when we have found a way to be Christian without being at all offensive, and that should concern us. And there are other times when our lives have the effect of challenging the world.

Let me also be clear that Paul and Silas didn't go out trying to stir up trouble. They were just being themselves, and trouble found them. But when it found them, they were undaunted by it. They assumed such things could happen to those who follow Jesus.

So the forces of hell succeeded in taking our heroes and clapping them in irons. They fell silent and were never heard from again. No, actually, that's not the way the story ends!

## **Servants of the victorious Savior**

Verses 25-34:

**But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners**

were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 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 together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

Everything has been wonderfully turned on its head! The worst that the venom of the enemy could do didn't work. Light shone into the darkness. The hands that had clapped Paul and Silas in irons were now washing their wounds. The extraordinary earthquake that physically freed the prisoners, coupled with the evidence of Paul's and Silas' faith, surely challenged all their fellow prisoners as well as this jailer. The prisoners must have been shaken just by their singing. Make careful note: they were singing hymns to God *before* anything good happened. They didn't know how God was going to get them out of this. No one had come riding to the rescue. Yet they still sang hymns, assuming that their Lord had not abandoned them.

Verses 35-40:

**Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men." And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.**

Paul's insistence that the chief magistrates bring them out themselves was not just feistiness. He was giving the church standing in its community. It wasn't likely this young church would be threatened again any time soon by these folks, because they had botched things so badly the first time. They were going to be much more likely to leave these young Christians alone.

In a matter of a few hours, dire circumstances had turned to glory. Everything had changed. The mob had dissipated, and in place of the mob, a small community of believers in Lydia's house is in view.

What we see in this microcosm of one twenty-four-hour period is the way the message of Christ is both received and resisted. Jesus' servants invoke his name, which brings down a stronghold of evil. Then enemies dig in against them and do their worst to them. God supplies the power for his servants to stand firm. At the end of the day it is the servants of Christ who stand, and those who oppose him who have fallen. This is a story that most of us see working out slowly. We are never quite sure where we are in the process. But the timeline is compressed here to make a point: this is the truth about the way God works. The gospel wins people and creates problems. We are in a battle, and God honors his servants who stand for him in the battle. The Lord wins at the end. We serve a victorious Savior. The grave could not hold him, and those who fight against his servants will not succeed.

## **Serving dangerously and standing firm**

I said before that one of the challenges of this text is to ask ourselves whether there is anything about us that

poses an appropriate threat to the world we live in. Or do we adhere to this faith just because what we really want is to make ourselves more successful at being worldly? Religion might make you disciplined, and if you are more disciplined you can make more money. If you get along with people better you will be more successful. Have we fallen into well-scrubbed worldliness, forgetting that Jesus' name invoked in power is going to have the effect of both the aroma of life to life and the aroma of death to death (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)?

There is another question raised by this text: Are we sure we are going to win? The long struggle to tell yourself the truth, to believe it, to stand firm, at times can seem too costly. Are we sure that the Lord will one day have us at his side in honor, and that the things that have dragged us down will be gone? If we are sure, then we will keep singing even when we don't know how he is going to get us out of trouble.

First John 4:4 says, "Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (NRSV.) How do we speak the word of the Lord against the things that worry and dominate us, pull the clouds down thickly over us? One of the things we can draw from this text is the assurance that in the end, Jesus' servants will be standing, and everything that has been arrayed against them will have fallen. It is worth it to stay in the fight!

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 1:24-25.)

---

Where indicated, the Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All other Scripture quotations are taken from New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Catalog No. 4768  
Acts 16:16-40  
28th Message  
Steve Zeisler  
May 2, 2004



series: [The Great Adventure](#)  
next message: [Silas](#)  
previous message: [Lydia](#)

formats: [mp3](#), [pdf](#)

Copyright © 2004 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.