

Philippi

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Today's Old Testament reading is from Isaiah chapter 56, verse 1 to 8. Isaiah chapter 56, verse 1 to 8. This is what the Lord says.

Maintain justice and do what is right. For my salvation is close at hand, and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

Let no foreigner who has bind himself to the Lord say, The Lord will surely exclude me from his people. And let not any eunuch complain, I am only a dry tree. For this is what the Lord says. To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleads me, and hold fast to my covenant, to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it, and who hold fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.

[1 : 07] Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. The sovereign Lord declares, He who gathers the exiles of Israel, I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.

Hi, my name is Derek and I'm one of the members here at Brunsville, and it's been my privilege this morning to have been asked to read from God's Word, from the New Testament in the Book of Acts, chapter 16, verses 11 to 40.

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went to Naples, and from there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city of that district of Macedonia, and we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women there who had gathered there.

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God.

[2 : 19] The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and her members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house.

And she persuaded us. Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she had predicted the future.

She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, These men are the servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved.

She kept us up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned round 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. When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

[3 : 21] They brought them before the magistrates and said, These men are Jews and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs, unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose.

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. But Paul shouted, Don't harm yourself.

[4 : 28] We are all here. The jailer called for lights, rushed in and felt trembling before Paul and Silas. 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. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house.

At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds. Then immediately, all his household 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 household. Then it was daylight. The magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order, Release those men.

The jailer told Paul, The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace. Now, but Paul said to the officers, They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison.

[5 : 39] And now, do they want to get rid of us quietly? No, let them come themselves and escort us out. The officers reported this to the magistrates.

When they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.

After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Amen. Well, good morning, folks. It's lovely to have you with us. Let me invite you to grab a Bible if you have one there and come with me to the book of Acts and to chapter 16.

This is where we're going to be over the next little while. We're going to be thinking about and seeing what happened when the gospel that is the good news of Jesus when that message hit Europe.

[6 : 45] So to get us into this today, let me just ask you a question. What do a bull, an electric fence, and an expensive lawyer have in common?

Okay, it's going to be really painful if any of them charge you. Okay, so one day, I really hope that joke gets a laugh, but not today. But see, while we're on the topic of things that people have in common, let me ask you another question.

What do a businesswoman, a slave girl, and a prison guard have in common? Now, that sounds a bit like it's the beginning of another joke, and just before you turn off, let me tell you that it's not.

Actually, it's the riddle that's at the heart of our passage in Acts chapter 16, because this is what we're going to see today. We're going to meet three very different people.

Three very different people, and we're going to hear their three different stories about how each of their lives has been transformed by the one same Savior.

[8 : 00] So these three different people are miles apart in terms of who they are, in terms of what they do, and in terms of how life has turned out for each of them.

You could not pick three more different individuals. And we meet them all in Acts chapter 16. So as you're turning there, let me just bring you up to speed with where we are in the book of Acts.

Because the gospel, that is the good news of the crucified, risen, reigning, and one day returning glorious Jesus, has been taken into the world by the twelve apostles.

And despite some pretty severe opposition at times, every so often in the book of Acts, Luke gives us the repeated phrase, the word of the Lord continued to multiply.

The word of the Lord continued to multiply. So in other words, nothing is going to stop the momentum of this message as God, through the power of His Holy Spirit, is deeply convicting men and women of their sin, of their need of God, and at the same time is pointing them and drawing them to the message of Jesus, the one in whom is found forgiveness and newness of life.

[9 : 28] And people are becoming Christians in their thousands. And one of these people is this man named Paul. This former persecutor of Christians who is stopped in his tracks by the risen Jesus as he is on his way to make sure that Christians are put in jail.

He encounters the risen Jesus and his life is transformed. And this former persecutor becomes a preacher. And he's got a heart to take the news of Jesus to the peoples of the nations who have yet to hear about him.

So this is where we are in Acts chapter 16. 16. So this guy Paul guided by the Holy Spirit has made his way to Europe. And he's made his way to this city called Philippi.

And so it's in this Roman and in this prestigious city that God births a church. So here's what I want you to imagine.

Imagine these guys are having their first ever church meeting. Right, we'll stick with theme and we'll call it Philippi Evangelical Church. Here they are having their first meeting, right?

[10:50] Someone's brought the quiche. Someone else has brought the schlore. Someone else has brought their guitar complete with rainbow strap and is handing around the lyrics of Shine Jesus Shine.

And once the novelty of that awkward icebreaker game has worn off, somebody turns and addresses the room and says, you know what, why don't we go around the room?

Why don't each of us tell us why you are here? Why don't each of you tell us why it is and how it is that you came to know Jesus as your saviour?

And since we've got a bit of manners here, why don't we do the ladies come first? Kind of thing. And so, but what about you, Lydia? Lydia, how did you come to trust Jesus?

And so here, verses 11 to 15 in the text, is the story of a lady who heard something different. You see, here's, and come with me, here's what Luke tells us about Lydia, verse 14.

[11:52] She's originally from this place just down the road called Thyatira. And she's most likely probably in Philippi on business. And do you notice how she's not just in any old business?

She is a seller of purple goods. And what we need to understand is that purple was the rare, expensive, and sought-after dye of the day.

Right? So put that together in modern-day terms. Lydia's working for the first century equivalent of Ralph Lauren here. She is the Karen Brady of her day.

She's used to hanging out with and connecting with the well-to-do, and all the while she's rocking a stylish gillie like there's no tomorrow. I mean, Lydia, as we meet her here, Lydia, the lady's got class.

And she's also a worshipper of God. You see, Luke tells us that. Which means that even though she's not a Jew, she recognizes and she worships the gods that the Jews worship.

[13:01] She's a God-fearer. This is Lydia. And Paul and his traveling companions, they meet Lydia at this place of prayer down by the river. And what do they do?

They simply share the gospel with her. And I love how gentle what happens next is. Because as they were telling her, her eyes are opened and her heart lights up because what they were saying is everything that she'd been searching for.

Because they told her about Jesus. Now, just before we get the impression that Paul's rocked up here and delivered the ultimate two ways to live demonstration, see what Luke tells us about what's really going on behind the scenes.

What's happened here? Well, the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. See, this is Jesus.

Jesus is on the move. Jesus took the key and unlocked the door of her heart. He opened the curtains into her dark heart and light came flooding in.

[14:13] And just like that, Lydia got it. Silently, gently, but boy, did she get it. And the thing is, how many of us have stories just like that?

Right? There was no dramatic moment. There was no angelic encounter. I mean, Netflix didn't ring us up and ask if they could make a documentary about our journey to faith because it would be the most boring documentary ever.

But make no mistake that every single person who decides to follow Jesus is an example of a miracle of mercy.

Because there's nothing unspectacular, is there, about God taking a spiritually dead person and breathing into them life. I love what happens next.

What does Lydia do? Does she say, that's great, and she moves on with her life? No, she gets involved in gospel work. Do you see it? And so Lydia starts using the things that she has, which will have been many, and she becomes a patron for gospel work.

[15:22] I love that. Many of you will know my predecessor here, John Gemmel. He now works for an organization down in London called the Proclamation Trust.

And really, it's a Bible school that's training people how to handle the Bible, and it's just sending them out into the world. And the vision for the Proclamation Trust came from a man called Dick Lucas.

Many of you might have heard of him, and Dick Lucas, he had the vision for the Proclamation Trust, but he lacked the contacts and the money to make it a reality.

And he met a wealthy Christian businesswoman rather, called Ronnie Wilcox, and he shared with them the vision. And instantly, Ronnie Wilcox bought into the vision, and he gave Dick Lucas the seed money to start the Proclamation Trust.

And now they reckon that 1,500 people have come through that course, and the vast majority of them are still working somewhere in the UK. Isn't that fantastic? You see, Lydia plays that role here in Philippi.

[16:36] She gets involved in gospel work. She becomes a gospel patron. In fact, she's most likely the one who's hosting this little church as it meets. I love that. That's something that some of you as you're watching this might want to consider.

We all need to consider it. How can we use what the Lord has given us for his work? So this is Lydia. Right, we're back in this first church meeting of Philippi Evangelical Church.

Lydia's finished her story and she tags to her right. And we move from a lady who heard something different to a girl, and this is verses 16 to 24, a girl who received something different.

Because you see, if Lydia is a woman who in a sense has got everything going for her, she's got everything she'd ever need. Well, here is a girl who's at the other end of the spectrum who has absolutely nothing going for her.

Here is this slave girl. In fact, do you notice in the text that she's a double slave? Do you see that? Because not only are her owners treating her like property, which is frightening in itself to think about what that might have meant for this young woman.

[17:57] woman, she's also demon possessed. And you take those two things together and join them, and that is a situation that should break our hearts.

And what this slave girl has done for days, do you see it? She's followed Paul and Silas around, and she just shouted at them the whole time. And it seems that verse 18, that Paul gets to the point where he's had enough.

Now, the word that we get in verse 18 there is annoyed. It says Paul was greatly annoyed. And we hear that and we think to ourselves, yeah, I know what that means to be annoyed. When that person cuts me up in the bypass, that is annoying.

When my internet connection cuts out on the vital part of that Zoom call, that is annoying. Is that what Paul is feeling? Well, do you see the word in Greek, it carries with it a lot more of the sense that when Paul looked at this girl and he considered her situation, that he was deeply grieved in his soul.

Because he looked at this slave girl and he thought to himself, that is not right. That is not how it should be. And incredibly through Paul, the risen Jesus frees this girl from her double bondage.

[19:18] Do you see it? And do you see as well in the text how there's a hope reversal? How at the beginning of this episode, her owners, they've got all the hope of making the money here because they can exploit this girl.

But now at the end of the story, verse 19, they recognize their hope has gone. Who's got the hope now? This slave girl has the hope. Now listen, it's not explicit in the text that she became a Christian.

But I think the fact not only that Luke has recorded this event, but the fact that he has sandwiched it between Lydia and the jailer who will come on to meet in just a second, the way that he's structured that, I think we can read that as if she did.

And this girl with nothing going for her, we're not even told here she's got any kind of family who would look after her, she's welcomed in to this family of faith. And just think on that, right?

I love what that tells us about the God of the Bible. Because here is a slave girl who probably spent her life every evening crying herself to sleep, thinking to herself, does anybody care?

[20:30] Does anybody know? Does anybody see? Well, what does this tell you? It tells you that God sees. And God knows. And God cares.

And I love this in the context of the book of Acts. What's this telling us? It's telling us that God cares about the thousands. And God cares about the individuals. Here is a girl who in many respects to the world is unseen.

And yet to the God of the Bible, she is loved and known. Do you know what? She's a girl who's received something different. What has she received? Well, through God's people, she has received the compassion of Christ.

You know, one of my fellow pastors in Edinburgh, and one of the guys I've got the utmost respect for is a man called Mez McConnell.

And he ministers down at Nidrae Community Church, just down the road, really around the corner from where we live. And his story of coming to faith reminded me this week of the slave girls.

[21 : 35] And he wrote his story about how he came to faith, and he simply called it, Is anybody out there? I'll let you read it and journey with him in his story, but such a big part of him coming to faith was the fact that when he was in prison, some Christians that he knew, they didn't give up on him, but actually they kept on visiting him and chatting to him about Jesus.

And when Mez eventually got released because he had nowhere to go and to save him sliding back into old patterns, these Christians invited him to come and live with them, with them rather.

And slowly but surely Mez's life as he heard the gospel from these Christians and as he saw their lives, began to make a massive impact on his own.

And he gave his life to Jesus. And now the guy runs a network of church planters targeting planting churches in some of the most deprived areas, not just of Scotland, but of the world.

So there's a guy who encountered the compassion of Christ through the Lord's people. And that's the slave girl's story about how she came to meet Jesus. So we're back at our first church meeting, right?

[22 : 56] And after the slave girls told her story, she tags to her right as well. And we move finally from a girl who received something different to a man, and this is verses 25 to 40, a man who saw something different.

Because you know, you see in the text, there was a real cost to the freedom of that slave girl for Paul and Silas. It didn't go unnoticed. The locals, what do they do?

They've kicked off and these two men have ended up being flogged and put in jail. And the jailer, do you see, he makes sure that, boys, you are going nowhere fast.

And so here is this jailer. He's our third person on the scene here. Now he's probably an ex-Roman soldier who's now been given a gig looking after this jail as a kind of easing you into retirement kind of thing.

And what does that mean? Well, it means that this guy is an ex-Roman soldier. It means that he had seen some serious stuff in his life. And given his new job in this jail, he'll have seen and heard some serious characters in his life as well.

[24 : 05] Now he's probably, I'd imagine he's a hardened guy, right? He's the kind of guy that watches Ross Kemp on gangs. He's the kind of guy that wears the tattoos. And he's probably the kind of guy that says, religion, not for me, thanks.

Don't do that emotional stuff. I don't do that kind of stuff. But do you know what? He's seen a lot of stuff in his life, but he's seen nothing. He's seen like what he's about to see this night.

And everything about this scene is strange if you've got it there, okay? Notice three really strange things that we get in the text. Here's the first thing from the jailer's perspective. Firstly, what's strange is that he hears Paul and Silas.

He hears them. Now remember these two men, their wounds are still fresh and raw. And what are they doing? Are they crying? Are they complaining? What are they doing? Verse 25, they're singing.

And they're not singing always look on the bright side of life. They're in there. What they're doing is they're belting out, kumbaya, my Lord. And it's clearly that loud because the jailer, do you notice, and the prisoners can all hear them.

[25 : 16] Now there is an episode of Songs of Praise I'd love to see, wouldn't you? The prison cell sessions. That's what I'd call it. But that is so weird that these men are singing.

And second weird thing is that there's an earthquake. Reminds you a little bit, doesn't it, of the earthquake that happened just after Jesus had risen. In other words, this is no natural disaster.

This is God's doing. God is moving in this moment. But what happens in this earthquake is that all the doors of the jail and all the chains of the prisoners fall off.

Do you see that? Imagine you're a prisoner in this evening. I mean, this is a goal against the run of play. Here is freedom on a plate with a knife and fork and a serviette.

Your freedom is there. Take it. And the jailer goes to take his own life. That's what you would have done as a Roman soldier to save your dignity, probably to save your bosses from doing it.

[26 : 18] That's the second weird thing. The third weird thing, get this, verse 28, with their freedom right there on a plate, they can have it.

What does he say? He says, we are all still here. Right? Did you get that? We are all still here.

So not just Paul and Silas, but all the prisoners have stayed. Are you kidding me? They have stayed? So rather than take their freedom, what's going on here is that they were so captivated by what was going on with Paul and Silas that they chose to hang around to see how this one played out.

They picked that over their freedom. I mean, man alive, that's weird. So the jailer puts all these three things together. The strange scene.

And he runs and he pleads. Probably he's maybe even heard about Paul and Silas and what they're doing in Philippi in the city. And he runs, verse 31, what does he say? What must I do to be saved?

[27 : 29] There is the Holy Spirit bringing this deep sense of conviction to this man that he is not right with God, that he's seen something here. What does he say? Tell me more. Tell me how.

Tell me what this is all about. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him. They told him about Jesus. And just like that, this man gave his life to Christ and experienced the forgiveness and the newness of life that is found in him.

And he runs and tells his family. Do you see it? And his family come to faith as well. They are baptized. Praise the Lord. What a wonderful scene. Here's a thought for you.

Do you know, I was reflecting on it this week. I don't think the jailer was converted here because he saw a massive earthquake. Right? I'm sure he's maybe seen some pretty spectacular stuff in his life.

But I don't think it was the earthquake. Do you know what? I think he came to know Jesus initially because he saw how God's people reacted differently.

[28 : 40] Looking at Paul and Silas thinking, what are they doing? I cannot figure them out. But you know what? Boy, is it compellingly attractive. You see, Paul and Silas, I love this and I find this so challenging this week.

Do you see their utter confidence in God's sovereignty? In other words, it might look like utter chaos to us. It might look to us like the gospel has run out of gas.

But do you know what? We can trust that God is our good father and he is fulfilling his good purposes in this and every single moment. In other words, Aslan is on the move.

We are here for a reason. So let's keep trusting. Let's keep speaking. And let's see what he is doing. Such is their confidence in the sovereignty of God.

Friends, do you know what? Let me encourage us as a church to take hold of that mindset just now.

As we live distinctly different lives during this time of COVID-19 in the way that we speak in the way that we act in the way that we love in the way that we pray all of these things testifying to the fact that we trust and love the God of the gospel.

[30 : 03] Because how many of us have a story just like the jailers in that respect? We saw something different as we looked at Christians, that they had something that we didn't, that there was something that was true for them that wasn't true for us and that made us want to find out more.

And if that's you here today, maybe you've tuned into this, maybe you've clicked on the link as you found it on Facebook or something like that, we'd love to get in touch with you. I know there's some details at the bottom there if you click on the link you'll be able to get in touch, we'd love to be able to connect, maybe that's you today, maybe you want to find out more, who is this Jesus?

But just as we close, what do a businesswoman, a slave girl and a prison officer have in common?

These three different people, we've heard their three different stories about how each of their lives was transformed by the one same saviour, the one who can change any and every heart no matter how unlikely we think that is.

And do you know what, see what's true for Philippi Evangelical Church here? It is true for every church across the world and it is also true for Brunfield Evangelical Church.

[31 : 29] I know we are a church of very different people, all with very different stories, but of how we all came to know the one true king.

And we're going to hear one of those stories now as one of our members tells us how she came to know Jesus as her king. Good morning everyone, my name is Simona and I'm one of the members here at Brunfield Evangelical Church and today I'm going to tell you the story of how I met Jesus. I've always believed in God's existence but never thought he would care much about what was happening in my life. When I was 15, a friend of mine, who now is my husband, told me about Jesus.

He said that Jesus saved him, that Jesus loved him and cared for him and he wanted to share that with me to help me understand what it would look like to believe in a God who is not only a distant creator but a personal saviour.

So we started to read the Bible together and the more I knew about God, the more I wanted to know and I've learned a few important things about God reading the Bible, that God is perfect and I am not, that there are only two places where we end up once we die, with God or without God and I am not able to earn a place with God because I am not perfect, so I need another way in.

[32 : 55] And the Bible says that this way in is Jesus. He is the only one that loves me enough and is willing to cover for all my imperfections so that I can be with God.

All this was quite clear in my mind but it took years to actually understand that with my heart and to realise how real and tangible God's presence was in my life.

God knows me in a way that no one else does and yet he loves me. I am his child and he cares for me. And he always cared for me even when I couldn't see it.

I know that even when things seem out of control God is in control. And having Jesus as my saviour gives me peace because I know that dying on the cross and rising again he has done all that needed to be done so that I can be sure that once I die I will be with God.

I am not special. I don't deserve what Jesus did for me and I keep messing up but it's a gift and I decided to accept it.

[34 : 11] And the beauty of this gift is that it's not just for some people but it's for all who want to accept it. God and so if you're watching this today and you'd love to find out more about this Jesus it would be our privilege to be able to tell you about him and pray with you.

We'd love to connect with you. You'll find an email address at the bottom of this YouTube service.

You'll also find all our details on the website so let me encourage you to connect with us.

It'd be wonderful to meet you that way. But just as we finish let me lead us in a very short prayer.

Father thank you that you are the good God of the gospel that can transform each and any life.

And maybe for some of us tuning in today maybe even for the first time may we know the truth as we encounter your son Jesus who said I am the way and the truth and the life.

So Father thank you for this time. We pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.