

Marks

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual Friendships
Service In & Beyond the Church

of Discipleship

November 14, 2021

Day 1: Acts 16:16-17

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."

The slave girl was possessed by a spirit. This account is reminiscent of the time Jesus went into the synagogue at Capernaum (Mark 1:21-26). In both cases the person possessed knows that Paul and Jesus are from God before the rest of the crowd does. It is hard to tell if Paul is upset by her following them or the fact that her masters are making money off of her problem. It is like the way people have made money from showing physical oddities at a circus.

Question: What would irritate you about the girl if you were with Paul?

Challenge: Read your horoscope in the paper and see if it predicts. Then ask, does it predict or do you give it meaning?

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 33:1-10

Day 2: Acts 16:18

She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

The healings that take place in Acts are all in the name of Jesus. This may seem obvious to us today but the biblical writers want to make it clear that God is doing the work, not a human or some other deity. It is possible for doctors and others to heal but it is always with a sense that God gave to them the ability to heal. Everything we do in life is because God first gave us life and part of that life is the abilities we have. It is our responsibility to improve our talents and then use them to bring about life, not death. The girl's "gift" was bringing profit to some, but harm to her.

Question: Why do you think the girl kept following and "troubling" Paul?

Challenge: If you believe in demon possession, how would you tell the difference between possession and mental illness?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:15-22

Day 3: Acts 16:19-22

When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 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 practice." The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.

While Paul and Silas (and also the early Christian community) condemn the exploitation of another for profit, the owners and townspeople saw Paul and Silas as the criminals, not the healers. In the New Testament, relationships are the measure of how God is honored. The Church had little problems with ownership until it involved the abuse of people or the wrongful use of others. The world will always hold ownership as a higher value than individuals. Jesus and the church have other ideas.

Question: Is there any way Paul and Silas were in the wrong?

Challenge: Define slavery.

Scripture: Exodus 2:11-25

Day 4: Acts 16:23-26

After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such 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 such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

The beating of Paul and Silas is a prime example of power being used for harm. Sin had so confused the town's authorities that they punished those doing good. It would be as if you were punished for feeding or clothing someone. Paul and Silas pass the time giving praise to God for being worthy to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Even in jail they kept their principles. They believed that the jailer was worth more than their freedom, even though he was an unbeliever. Other prisoners may or may not have escaped but Paul and Silas stayed where they were.

Question: Why did God open the doors and break the chains for everybody?

Challenge: What songs would you sing if you were in Paul's position? What songs have been helpful to you during a difficult time?

Scripture: Galatians 4:21-31

Day 5: Acts 16:27-28

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! We are all here!"

The jailer was a pagan and perhaps a non-believer in any sort of divinity. His life was still worth more than their freedom. We can learn much from Paul and Silas' example. We should never kill a person because of their unbelief. Jesus invited all people into the Kingdom.

Question: Why do you think people wanted to kill themselves in 1929 at the stock crash?

Challenge: If you believe in a life for a life under what circumstances would this be true for you?

Scripture: Galatians 5

Day 6: Acts 16:30-34

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 to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.

The result of Paul and Silas's action was that the pagan became a believer. The jailer saw faith in action and knew that even if he lost his life for freeing the prisoners he was better off with God, than safe without God.

Question: What do you think happened to the jailer? Do you think he kept on being a jailer and if so, how do you think he acted toward those in his jail?

Challenge: Have you ever been in the situation where you asked God "what must I do to be saved?"

Scripture: Romans 10:8-11