

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE GOSPEL IN EUROPE

(Acts 16:11-40)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 31

1. Christ does not want the testimony of demons.
2. God sometimes calls men to the place of suffering.
3. The way of salvation is plain and simple.
4. Christians may assert their civil rights for the honor of God.
5. There is no group too small to begin the service of Christ.
6. There is sure to be opposition to the work of zealous Christians. It will sooner or later effect the gains of the wicked.
7. Opposition to the cause of Christ is usually veiled behind some claim of philanthropy or patriotism.
8. True faith keeps men cheerful under trial.
9. Faith that is strong and true is never disappointed.

God had called Paul to Europe by a vision. When he received the vision, he and his company lost no time in hastening to Philippi. From Neapolis to Philippi he was again on the old Roman road which, as Cicero said, connected Rome with the Hellespont. That part of it was called the Agnation road.

TO PHILIPPI

The distance from the seaport, Neapolis, to Philippi was about eight miles. Between the two there lay a mountain. After climbing the mountain from Neapolis, the city of Philippi would burst into view. It lay on a plain at the foot of the mountain. It was the first city to which one comes when he enters that country. It was a city of great importance, but possibly not the most important. It was the first city from the Thracian frontier and the first place where Paul paused to preach in Macedonia. Philippi was a very old city, even in Paul's day. During its earliest history it had been called by another name, but when Philip of Macedon conquered the Thracians he built a fortress on the Acropolis which would have full command of the surrounding country and called it after himself. After it fell into the hands of the Romans it still retained Philip's name.

A ROMAN COLONY

On the plain surrounding the city was fought the battle between Brutus and Cassius on the one side, and Antony and Octavius on the other. As a result, Octavius under that name of Augustus, assumed imperial power. Thenceforth the city was greatly favored and became a Roman colony. A Roman colony was not distantly separated from, and subordinate to, the Imperial city, as we think of a colony. But a colony was looked upon as a part of the city of Rome. The colonists consisted of old soldiers or freedmen. The political atmosphere of the place was wholly Roman. The colonists had the rights of Roman citizens and had the privilege of appeal from their own magistrates to the emperor of Rome.

FEW JEWS

There were apparently not many Jews in the city as there is no mention of a synagogue. Where there were ten prominent Jewish men they were supposed to have a synagogue. They possibly had a mere enclosure outside of the city where they worshipped which was called a "proseucha" in the Greek. Here by the river their hands could be washed before prayer. It seems that all, or nearly all those who met for worship were women. The name of one of these was Lydia. This was not her native city. She was from Asia, from a place where Paul had been forbidden to preach, from a city where a church was afterward founded by the name of Thyatira. It was celebrated for its purple dye and the robes which were made there. One naturally wonders why Paul was not permitted to preach the word in Asia and lead this woman to Christ there. She and her household may have formed the first nucleus of the church at Thyatira when it was founded later. Paul was called to take the Gospel to Europe, but the Lord knew the best manner in which to spread the message. By preaching there he would reach those from Asia who would carry the Gospel back to that continent.

THE FIRST CONVERT

Lydia was the first person who was converted in Philippi. Her heart was opened of the Lord to receive the Gospel. She listened attentively to the message of Paul. She desired baptism and not only she, but her household with her, were baptized. She evidently had a place of abode in Philippi for she urged Paul and his company to come into her house and allow her to entertain them.

A SLAVE GIRL

As Paul and his company went to prayer, a slave girl who was possessed with a spirit of Python, which was one of the names of Apollo, followed them. She kept crying out, saying, "**These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation**" (16:17). The evil spirit in her recognized what some of the sane people did not, that these were servants of the Most High God. But what did she mean when she said, they shew unto us the way of salvation? Salvation was not a new word to the people of Philippi.

It was the Greek word, “soteria”, which possibly appeared upon stones by the side of the road where she stood shrieking at the missionaries. Stones have been discovered containing vows to Zeus the Thunderer for salvation. The fact that men set up stones asking for salvation showed that it stood for something which they greatly desired. Their idea of the word was not the same as that taught by Paul and Silas. Yet they were seeking something higher and better and beyond the range of mortal life. Later when the jailer cried, “**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**” (16:30), he was using a word which he knew before Paul and Silas came to Philippi, but which he had no doubt heard had been used by them and repeated by this noted Pythoness as she followed them day after day. He had likely wondered what she, and they, meant by it.

DEVIL’S TESTIMONY NOT ACCEPTED

After the girl who was possessed with the evil spirit had followed them for many days Paul was grieved and said to the spirit, “**I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour**” (16:18).

Why should Paul be troubled? Why should he not let this demon possessed girl give her testimony? She was telling the truth. She was helping to advertise their preaching. Our Lord made it plain during His earthly ministry that He did not want the testimony of demons. Even when the Devil tells the truth he does not please Christ. One of the efforts of Satan, all through the centuries, has been to have a voice in Christian preaching and worship. He will tell the truth for a time that he may have an opportunity to pervert the truth later. A union with any of the devils agents is always most disastrous to the Christian church. Christ does not want the testimony of evil men even though they may, for the time being, speak the truth. He wants true testimony from good men, but not even true testimony from bad men. Attaching such names as Spiritualism or Christian Science to institutions does not render their testimony acceptable to Christ. One of the most effective ways of the working of the Evil One is to speak through men who bear the name of Christ. The Christian church and the Christian ministry should beware of all such. Christ abhors such testimony. It may take courage to decline the testimony of an evil man when he is speaking the truth, but firmness should be exercised and his testimony resolutely refused.

SOURCE OF GAIN GONE

The spirit of divination which had troubled the girl so long had been a source of gain to her masters. Money was their god although they pretended to have a zeal for Apollo. Not moved because of the relief which had come to the girl, but angry because the source of their gain was gone, they dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace before the rulers and charged them with coming in from outside to trouble their city. They declared that they taught customs which it was not lawful for them to receive nor to observe being Romans. As is usually the case, when men bring a charge against those whom they hate, they did not mention the real source of their grievance. They made a pretence of seeking the welfare of Rome, or of being patriotic. It has ever been so with the liquor dealer and illegal drug peddler and the dishonest trader and the opponent of the missionary.

MISSIONARIES BEATEN AND IMPRISONED

The magistrates, without giving Paul and Silas an opportunity of making any defense, weak-willed politicians that they were, desiring to show their Roman patriotism commanded that they should be stripped and beaten. Slaves would seize the missionaries, strip off their robes, lay their backs bare and tie their hands to the whipping-post. Crowds would gather in greater numbers, anxious to see these troublesome Jews beaten and silenced. The bundles of rods would be unstrapped and the two men who were chosen to beat them would pull up their long sleeves and bring down the rods with cruel strokes on the backs of Paul and Silas. Every blow would cut through the skin or leave a great welt across the back. As the blood flowed from their torn backs there was no voice, as far as the record goes, raised on their behalf.

Suffering with terrible pain they would be led from the forum to the dark, dismal, pestilential prison. A strong rough door would be opened and the Roman soldiers would thrust them in rudely and command the jailer to keep them safely. And perhaps as they turned to leave they would say jeeringly to the jailer, these are the men who show you the way of salvation. As the jailer was commanded to keep them safely he cast them into the inner prison, a place where it was entirely dark and where chains were fastened with staples to the wall, and where the stocks were waiting into which their feet were firmly fastened. Their suffering must have been terribly intense. Sleep was impossible. Their smarting backs were still oozing blood. The close stench of the place and the ache of the uncomfortable position, as they were held in their stocks, added to their pain and rendered rest impossible.

HAD GOD CALLED THEM THERE?

They were away in a foreign land in prison and misery. Was it really the call of the Spirit that they had heard when the voice pleaded, “**Come over into Macedonia, and help us?**” (16:9). How could they testify in the prison? Even if they were released what would the people think of them? Was it not some hallucination by which Satan had deceived them? Should they not have remained in Asia?

PRAISING AND TESTIFYING IN PRISON

Such doubts possibly arose in their minds, but they were quickly silenced. They turned to God in prayer and found a way to testify even in prison. God had souls whom He wished to win within the confines of that jail through them. They loved the Lord so much that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Him. They sang praise to God. They knew that they had an audience with Him and they probably knew that the other prisoners could hear them. It was something new for those old prison walls to resound with praises of God. Terrible curses were continually arising from the cells of the dungeon on other days. What could possess these men who kept on singing even until midnight? When they were taught the Psalms as boys they had no idea that they would ever sing them under such circumstances. They saw a meaning in some of them that they had never seen before. What Psalms did they sing? We are not told, but we may well suppose what some of them were. The words of the One-Hundred-And-Second Psalm would probably come to their minds. They would be very appropriate.

**“For he hath looked down from
the height of his sanctuary;
from heaven did the Lord
behold the earth;
To hear the groaning of the
prisoner;
to loose those that are
appointed to death;
To declare the name
of the Lord in Zion,
and his praise in Jerusalem;
When the people are gathered
together,
and the kingdoms, to serve
the Lord”**

Or they may have sung from the One-Hundred-And-Seventh Psalm these words:

**“Then they cried unto the Lord
in their trouble,
and he saved them out of their
distresses.
He brought them out of darkness
and the shadow of death,
and brake their bands in sunder.
Oh that men would praise the Lord
for his goodness,
and for his wonderful works to
the children of men!
For he hath broken the gates
of brass,
and cut the bars of iron
in sunder”**

What words could have been more appropriate when God literally fulfilled this promise to His disciples? The earth shook! The foundations of the prison were shaken! The doors were opened and every one's bands were loosed. Paul and Silas were not frightened. They knew that it was the voice of God in the earthquake. They rejoiced that He had set them free from their shackles. When the doors were thrown open some light would shine into the darkness. They could see the keeper of the prison hastening to see if the prisoners had escaped. When he saw the doors standing open he supposed that they had all made their escape, and thinking of the end of the man who allowed Roman prisoners to escape, he was taking hold of his short sword and would have fallen upon it to save himself from death at the hand of his superiors; but Paul seeing what he was about to do shouted: **“Do thyself no harm: for we are all here”** (16:28).

AN UNEXPECTED INQUIRER

The jailer called for lights and hurried into the center of the prison to where Paul and Silas were. He saw that the prisoners were all there and that these men were not jail-breakers. He probably recalled the words of the demon-possessed girl who had been freed from her spiritual bondage, who said, day after day: **“These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation”** (16:17). Tell me, said the trembling jailer, what is this way of salvation? **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** (16:30).

HOW TO BE SAVED

Paul and Silas answered at once: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house”** (16:31-32).

A CHANGED MAN

Then the jailer who had gone to bed an unbeliever, but who was ere the morning light dawned an humble Christian, took Paul and Silas and ministered to them as tenderly as he knew how. He washed their stripes and did all that he could to relieve their misery. When they had instructed the jailer and his family in the elementary facts of the Christian religion they baptized them. Food was provided for them at the jailer’s command, and as they ate together they rejoiced also together, not merely because they had been released from the filthy prison, but because they had been permitted to lead souls from darkness into the glorious light and liberty of the Lord Jesus Christ. The jailer, too, had been released from bondage which had held him all his life in sin.

VINDICATION DEMANDED

As soon as they could recover their bearing after the earthquake, no doubt the guards and the soldiers would hasten to tell the astonished magistrates - for they would likely be awakened by the earthquake - of the consternation in the prison. That Paul and Silas had not escaped when they were free was more than they could understand. At early dawn they sent word to the keeper of the prison, saying, **“Let those men go”** (16:35).

Paul now saw an opportunity, not only to vindicate himself, but to set the little group of Christians in a better light before the people of the great city of Philippi. He remembered how his enemies had followed him from city to city in Asia Minor, and had done all that they could to injure his name and bring into disrepute the cause of Christ, and he thought he would take advantage of the opportunity here to put a stop to the persecution in Philippi for the present at least. So in reply to the message from the magistrates, offering to let them go, Paul said: **“They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out”** (16:37).

The declaration that they were Romans struck terror into the minds of the magistrates. They had yielded to the mob the day before in order that they might show that they were loyal Romans. But now they were in serious danger themselves, not only of losing their position, but of being ruined. As Cicero had said, the magic words, *Civis Romanus Sum*, I am a Roman citizen, brought aid and safety even among barbarians in the remotest parts of the world. To claim this right, if it were not true, was to involve the death penalty. We can therefore understand why these men, who had used Paul and Silas so roughly, came with fawning politeness to take them out. When the magistrates received Paul's message they stepped down from their grand seats on the rostrum and personally escorted Paul and Silas out of the prison. They asked them, very gently, to depart from the city. They wanted the whole matter hushed as quickly as possible.

COMFORTING THE BRETHREN

The released missionaries went to the house of Lydia where, in all probability, the brethren were gathered for prayer and consultation. After they had spent a little time comforting them they departed. The time spent in Philippi, though short, enabled Paul to form some of the dearest friendships of his life. When writing to the Philippians at a later date he spoke in the most endearing terms. He called them his dearly beloved, his joy and crown. He valued the supplies sent to him from Philippi more than that which was sent by others. This was the response of a friendship made dear through trials and suffering.

NO GROUP TOO SMALL TO SERVE CHRIST

There is no group too small to begin the service of Christ. There were no prominent worshippers at Philippi when Paul and his company went there. Those who went out to the humble place of gathering by the river side were women and not many of them.

Would it be of any use to preach to Lydia? Would not the acceptance of the Gospel bring such persecution that her business would be ruined? Could she be expected to profess Christ? They had no synagogue. Would it be possible to build up a church there? Such considerations did not discourage Paul. He preached to this little group and presented Christ and Him crucified.

Have not Christian churches in every instance arisen from a small group in the beginning? We are not to despise the day of small things. We remember what our Lord told us of the grain of mustard seed. It is one of the largest of herbs, so large that the birds can find shelter in its branches. This is a picture of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. It had an insignificant beginning. Two disciples were called. One of these brought his brother. A third who had been called brought one of his friends. Thus the church grew until after two or three centuries it had overspread the Roman Empire. Today the followers of Christ are numbered by the millions. They are found in every part of the world and in the islands of the sea. Wherever the Gospel finds a new following today there are similar possibilities of remarkable growth. Let us never think that any group of Christians is too small to be worthy of our services as Christian workers or missionaries.

ENTHUSIASTIC CHRISTIANS ARE ALWAYS OPPOSED

There is sure to be opposition to the work of enthusiastic Christians. When the masters of the Pythoness saw that the hopes of their gain was gone they made the missionaries suffer. Whenever the Christian religion becomes sufficiently influential to oppose dishonest business and make inroads upon its income, it is sure to meet with opposition. Its followers will be charged with being trouble-makers.

Whenever the missionaries are successful in making known the dishonesty and cruelty of traders in heathen lands they are denounced as injurious. Those who oppose them spread reports far and wide in an effort to destroy the fair name of the followers of Christ and have them recalled from their places of work. Judson was opposed by the East India trading company. David Livingstone was despised by the Portuguese slave dealers. Sheldon Jackson was misrepresented by enemies in Alaska.

Christ drove the dishonest traders out of the temple. They persecuted Him; other men of like character persecuted Paul, and men of a similar evil disposition have caused Christ's true followers to suffer in all the ages since. Such treatment did not lessen Paul's earnestness in preaching the love of Christ, nor should it detract from ours.

OPPONENTS CLAIM TO BE PATRIOTS

Opposition to the cause of Christ is usually veiled behind some claim of philanthropy or patriotism. The men who opposed Paul claimed that a loyal Roman could not receive his teaching. The man who opposes a good religious movement seldom does so by advancing his real reasons. The motive behind all the opposition to Paul and Silas at this time was the loss of a dishonest income. The reason stated to the public was loyalty to Rome.

It is a warning to us to learn to discern when we hear charges made against religious leaders. The most of the charges made against good men are false. Let us make sure that they are true before we allow ourselves to be influenced by them.

FAITH CHEERS THOSE UNDER TRIAL

True faith keeps men cheerful under trial. Paul and Silas did not allow their many pains and surrounding physical condition to make them despondent. They sang praises to God. When a man could be cheerful under those circumstances he would likely be cheerful at all times.

There are few, if any, more noble examples of men who were joyful under trial than Paul. There were probably none tried more severely. Paul wrote, years after this when he was then in prison at Rome, that he had learned in whatever state he was to be content. Is our faith strong enough to keep us cheerful under real trials?

“It is easy enough to be pleasant,
When life flows along like a song;
But the man worthwhile,
Is the man that can smile,
When everything goes dead wrong.”

J.S. Holden, in one of his addresses, said: “Once in my early days in Newcastle-on-Tyne I went out for a walk on an exceedingly misty day. Suddenly, as I looked ahead, I saw what looked in the fog like a gigantic lion. Well, I am happy to tell you that I was brave enough to go on, and when I got up to this great massive lion in the fog, it turned out to be a church. The enemy that I feared in the mist proved to be the very sanctuary of God! I cannot tell you how many times in my ministry I have seen a lion in my way and I have said to myself, ‘I wonder if that will not prove to be the shrine of the Almighty?’ Nine times out of ten, I have found that the apparent hostility and menace was the sanctuary of the love and grace of God?”

FAITH NEVER DISAPPOINTED

Faith that is strong and true is never disappointed. Paul and Silas, when thrown into prison, continued to trust in God. They were not disappointed. God heard their prayers and answered, possibly more quickly than they dared hope.

God will always bring relief, if not to deliver, to sustain and comfort in the midst of trial. Not all of God’s people have been delivered from suffering; not all have been delivered from death; there are those included in the list of the heroes of faith, in the eleventh of Hebrews, who died under persecution. Those who were stoned, sawn asunder, or slain with the sword were not delivered from death, but their victory was none the less certain. Their faith was not disappointed. They were taken earlier than their companions to dwell with Jesus in the mansion which He had prepared. Later in Paul’s life, when he was about to be beheaded, he did not feel that his faith was disappointed. He said: **“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”** (II Timothy 4:6-8).

“God never would send you the darkness,
If He felt you could bear the light;
But you would not cling to His guiding hand
If the way were always bright;
And you would not care to walk by faith
Could you always walk by sight.

So He sends you the blinding darkness,
And the furnace of sevenfold heat;
‘Tis the only way, believe me,
To keep you close to His feet;

For 'tis always so easy to wander
When our lives are glad and sweet.

Then nestle your hand in your Father's,
And sing, if you can, as you go;
Your song may cheer someone behind you
Whose courage is sinking low."

QUESTIONS (Acts 16:11-40)

1. What was the first point to which Paul and his company carried the Gospel in Europe?
2. What was the relative importance of Philippi?
3. What leads us to think there were not many Jews in Philippi?
4. Who was the first convert in Philippi?
5. What lesson do we learn from the method of the first mission work here?
6. What lesson do we learn from Lydia's treatment of the missionaries?
7. Did God want the testimony of the demon possessed girl?
8. What did God enable Paul to do for her?
9. How was this received by her masters?
10. Why did they object to the girl's freedom?
11. How does this compare with the usual underlying cause of opposition to the Gospel?
12. In stirring up a mob did the masters state their real grievance? Why?
13. On what charge were they thrust into prison?
14. What does true faith do for men who are under trial? What for Paul and Silas?
15. Is there any evidence that they doubted the divine call because of the persecution?
16. What would you say of men who though suffering would praise God and give their testimony at midnight in prison?
17. What did God do for them?
18. What did He do for the keeper of the prison?
19. What answer did the missionaries give to the jailer as an inquirer? What answer would you give to an inquirer?
20. How were the missionaries vindicated and the brethren comforted?

~ end of chapter 28 ~

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