

## ACTS 16:16-26

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### [INTRODUCTION]

- There's something about the songs you listened to as a teenager.
  - They just stay with you in a way that nothing else quite does.
  - You hear the opening bars, and suddenly you're back there—the car, the bedroom, the friend group, the feeling.
- Neurologists actually have a name for this—the reminiscence bump—the music you absorbed between 13 and 25 gets hardwired in a way that later music simply doesn't.
  - Which might explain why this week I read this passage and got a *Coldplay* song stuck in my head.
  - *Nobody said it was easy. But no one ever said it would be this hard.*
- Whether you like Coldplay or not, most of us know that feeling.
  - You signed up for something. You knew it wouldn't be easy.
  - But you didn't quite expect... this.
- That's exactly where Paul and Silas find themselves in our passage.
  - And if you've been following Jesus for any length of time—you might recognize it.
  - Following Jesus brings things into your life that you don't expect.
    - Sometimes things you didn't ask for.
    - Sometimes things you don't even want.

### [Transition]

- Our passage shows us what this looked like for Paul and Silas—and how we can navigate these unexpected moments with hope.
- Three movements: interruption, opposition, prison.

## 1. INTERRUPTION (VV16–18)

### [State]

- In **V16**, Paul and Silas are on their way to prayer—likely to the same place they met Lydia last week—when suddenly they're met by a slave girl.
  - We're told she has a **spirit of divination**—she's possessed by a demon.
  - But we're also told that this dreadful malady has made her owners a lot of money.
    - She can predict the future.
    - And people are willing to pay to hear about their own.

- In **V17**, this young girl begins to follow Paul and his team, crying out—shouting, shrieking: **These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.**
  - It's wild that what the spirit says is absolutely true:
    - They are servants of the Most High God.
    - And they are proclaiming the way of salvation.
  - Remember what James says in his epistle?
    - **Even the demons believe—and shudder! (James 2:19).**
    - The day is coming when—every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord **(Php 2:10-11).**
- But **V18**: She follows them around for **many days**—shouting and shrieking—until Paul... do you see it there?
  - “Was filled with compassion...”
  - Nope—until he became **greatly annoyed...**
    - He's trying to get on with his ministry, and she's wearing him out with her yelling.
    - So he turns and speaks—not to the girl, but to the evil spirit:
      - **I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.**
      - And behold the power of Christ's name: **It came out that very hour.**

#### [Illustrate]

- Last week:
  - It was Lydia—the woman who had everything.
  - A successful businesswoman in control of her world.
- This week:
  - It's a slave girl—who has nothing, not even a name...
  - She can predict the future but has no future of her own...
    - Paul wasn't looking for her.
      - He was on his way to prayer...
      - Then going about his normal routine.
    - But God has his eye on her.
      - So he brings this interruption to Paul.
      - Because he has a daughter in chains—that he wants to set free.

#### [Apply]

- This is one of those thoughts that I find convicting and compelling at the same time.

***What we call an interruption... God might be calling our mission.  
The people we think are a problem... may be the very ones God is sending us to love.***

- I wonder if there's someone in your life like that.
  - Maybe it's that family member who always seems to bring the drama.
    - Every gathering, without fail. You've started to brace yourself before they arrive.
    - From the outside: a problem. But from God's perspective—someone he loves.
  - Or maybe it's the colleague who grates on you.
    - They're difficult. Prickly. Working with them takes twice the energy.
    - From the outside: an obstacle. But from God's perspective—someone he hasn't given up on.
  - Or maybe it's a neighbor, a friend, someone in our church you find hard to love.
    - Whatever the reason—you walk the other way when you see them.
    - You've quietly moved them from the “mission” category to the “manage” category.
- Here's the challenge this passage puts to us:
  - See past the demon—to see the girl.
  - See past the problem—to see the person.
  - See past the interruption—to see the mission.
- Maybe there's someone in your life and mine who needs us to do that for them this week.

**[Transition]:** Interruption. And then—Opposition.

## 2. OPPOSITION (VV19–22)

**[State]**

- **V19:** When her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.
  - A young girl is free—the demon is gone!
  - But her owners aren't happy because their revenue stream is gone too.
    - And the response is immediate rage.
    - Paul and Silas are **seized** and **dragged**.
- Soon, **V22:**
  - The crowd joins in. The magistrates act. Paul and Silas are beaten/stripped.
  - Men who did nothing but set a woman free—end up in chains.
- And notice how this happened...
  - The owners didn't say: *We're mad because they cost us money.*
  - Instead, they say, **V20:** These men... are disturbing our city... they advocate customs unlawful for us Romans.
    - Their real grievance doesn't show up in the charges.
    - We know financial loss is driving them, but they dress it up as civic concern.

### [Illustrate]

- If I'm honest, I find this idea convicting.
  - Because it doesn't just happen in Acts 16.
  - It's something that happens in our lives all the time.
    - We say one thing is happening...
    - When something else is really going on.
- Can I give you some examples?

### [Apply]

- First: Be aware of this in yourself.
  - When I'm angry or upset—it's worth asking:
    - What's my stated objection?
    - And what's really going on underneath?
      - Is it because of something they did?
      - Or is it really something that's going on in myself?
  - Sometimes this is small—Rosie and I had a fight this week.
    - I thought it was about something she said.
    - But it was actually about the fact that I was tired.
  - And there are lots of other examples:
    - Are you frustrated with your team, or did you not communicate well?
    - Are you anxious about a situation, or about the fact that you don't have control?
    - Do you really disagree, or do you just not want to admit that you're wrong?
  - Sometimes the thing we're reacting to isn't the thing that's really driving us.
    - It takes honesty to distinguish between the two.
    - But until we name what's underneath, it will keep on coming out sideways, and we won't grow.
- Second: Be aware of this in others.
  - When someone you love pushes back, pulls away, or picks a fight—it's worth asking:
    - What's the stated objection?
    - And what might be going on underneath it?
  - Maybe your spouse is an angry jerk—or maybe they don't know how to communicate that they're sad and need a hug.
  - Maybe your kid is pushing back on everything right now:
    - Your rules, your values, all you've taught...
    - Or maybe they don't know how to communicate that they're scared—of the future, of not measuring up, of not knowing who they are yet.
  - Or when we hear objections to our faith—I think of conversations I've had.
    - A man in his 30s who told me he couldn't believe in a God who allowed suffering. *As we talked, I learned his wife had died in a car accident the year before.*

- A teenager who told me she doesn't believe in organized religion. *Later, I found out she had been abused by a leader at her previous church.*
- The older woman who told me Christians make too big a deal of sin. *Then later wept over the guilt she carries from a decades-old abortion.*
- In every case, the stated issue and the real issue are not the same.
  - One thing is stated on the surface.
  - But underneath something else is going on.
- You don't need to psychoanalyze everyone.
  - But if you stay curious—if you ask one more question before you respond:
    - You might find your way underneath it.
    - And that's where the real conversation is.
  - With your friends, with your spouse and kids, with loved ones who don't know Christ... a little curiosity can turn a debate into a conversation about what's really going on.

**[Transition]**

- Unfortunately, that's not what happens for Paul and Silas.
- So, point 3: Interruption. Opposition. And they end up in prison.

**3. PRISON (VV23–24)**

**[State]**

- **V23:** When they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison.
- **V24:** [The jailer] put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.
- Notice how Luke slows down here.
  - Many blows. Inner prison. Feet in stocks.
  - He doesn't rush past it—he lets us sit with it.
- And remember how we got here:
  - Paul and Silas aren't here because they failed.
  - They're here because they were faithful.
- That's a hard truth—and I don't want to rush past it.
  - Sometimes following Jesus leads to the inner prison.
    - Not because you did something wrong.
    - But because you did something right.
  - Some of you know exactly what this feels like.
    - A relationship that broke because you held the line.
    - A professional cost you paid because you refused to compromise.
    - Scorn or mocking you received because of basic biblical beliefs.
  - The cell is real:
    - The gospel doesn't promise that faithfulness will keep you out of it.
    - Sometimes, faithfulness puts you into it!

### [Illustrate]

- We sometimes hear a version of Christianity that teaches the opposite.
  - That if you're doing things right, the road gets easier.
  - Health and wealth will be your reward.
- Sometimes we even whisper a subtler version of this to ourselves:
  - That your current struggle—your loneliness, miscarriage, diagnosis—must be your fault.
  - That the prison is judgment because you've done something wrong.
- Acts 16 shows us it's not that simple: Paul and Silas are in the inner prison not because they did something wrong but because they did what was right.
  - The inner prison isn't always a verdict on your faithfulness.
  - Sometimes it's evidence of your faithfulness.

### [Apply]

- Because sometimes—following Jesus brings things you didn't expect.
  - Things you didn't ask for.
  - Things you don't even want.
- So where's the hope in that???

### [THE CLOSE]

- Well—problems, difficulties, challenges...
  - They are part of the story.
  - But they are not the whole story.
- Look at what happens next...
  - In **V25**, Paul and Silas are praying and singing in prison.
  - Then everything changes in **V26**: There's an earthquake. The doors fly open. The chains fall off.
    - God breaks in and breaks them out.
    - It's amazing, spectacular, miraculous deliverance.
  - Prison did not get the final word.
- And that's true for us as well:
  - Our prisons—loneliness, rejection, grief—do not get the final word.
  - What happened for Paul and Silas immediately—will happen to us ultimately.
- How can we be sure?
  - Because we follow a King who went into the darkest cell of all—death itself—and walked out the other side.
  - And because he did—the story for everyone who belongs to him ends in resurrection life.
- When you're in prison—the earthquake is coming.
  - Maybe in this life—it might be closer than you think.
  - But certainly in the next.

- And that gives us the resilience to endure:
  - When the marriage is hard.
  - When the diagnosis doesn't change.
  - Or when people laugh at you for your faith.
- It gives us the courage to remain faithful:
  - When you're the only one in your family who still shows up to church.
  - When you've prayed for ten years, and heaven still feels silent.
  - Or when you lose a friendship because you follow Christ.
- It gives us the determination to hold on:
  - When you're tired.
  - When you're confused.
  - When you're in the inner prison, and you can't see the door.

## **[CONCLUSION]**

- Interruption. Opposition. Prison.
  - Following Jesus does bring things we didn't expect.
  - Things you didn't ask for.
  - Things you don't even want.
- But following Jesus also brings something else:
  - Something else you didn't earn.
  - Something else you don't deserve.
- Hope—that our stories end in life.
  - Nobody said it was easy.
  - But in Jesus—no one ever said it could be this good.

## RESOURCES

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This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1*.