

Acts 16:1-18

A Gospel that fits Everyone

Introduction: Acts is the history of the earliest Christians. We've been seeing throughout this book that the Gospel - The good news of what God has accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is for all people, it isn't confined to one type of person or one people group. But it also isn't just for a certain type of person - usually we think that Christianity fits either very moral people, people that have their lives together - conservative people... or maybe we think that it's just for the people that have hit rock bottom or maybe there is just a tendency in everyone of us and in our culture to say Christianity is not for me. This text shows a great diversity of people who come to Jesus.

There is a lot that has transpired in the narrative. Paul and Barnabas, because of a disagreement concerning John Mark, have parted ways. Silas, Timothy, and Luke have joined Paul on his second missionary journey. They have been trying to minister in the region of Bythinia (Modern day Turkey) but for some reason, we're not told why or how, the Holy Spirit kept on closing the doors of opportunity... until finally Paul has a vision of a Man of Macedonia (Modern day Greece) who says, "come over to Macedonia and help us". So Paul shared this with his companions and they concluded that God was calling them to preach the Gospel there. So the Gospel is coming to Europe, though they don't call it wasn't called Europe at the time. I imagine that many people were brought to salvation in Christ through Paul's time in Macedonia and Philippi, but Luke only focuses on three specific individuals, probably because they demonstrate how God breaks down dividing social barriers and can unite all different kinds of people in Christ because the Gospel is for everyone.

1. Lydia - The beauty of the Gospel

1. Paul and his companions find out that there is a meeting place of prayer at the river outside Philippi. When they get there though there is only a group of women. So they sit down and wait for an opportunity to share the gospel and as they do one lady in particular responds. It says, **"The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her**

household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us...”

2. The first convert to Christ is not a man as Paul saw in the vision but a woman - Lydia. It is possible that this was a kind of a nickname. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira - Thyatira was previously known as the kingdom of Lydia. Lydia might have been her trade name -the Lydian Lady. Thyatira had been known for centuries for it's famous dyes, and Lydia herself specialized in cloth treated with an expensive purple dye.
3. So Lydia is a wealthy, independent, business woman who sells beautiful clothes to beautiful rich people. She's like a high end designer for boutiques on Hayes st, Union square, or Maiden lane, in San Francisco.
4. But we're told she is also a worshipper of God - again this is a technical term for a Gentile who worships Yahweh but has not fully converted to Judaism. She had come from a pagan background and had been attracted to something about Judaism. One can only imagine the many Gentiles who turned to judaism because they had their fill of the debaucherous, empty, hopeless and selfish lifestyle of paganism (think of the Stoics and the Epicureans.)
5. The main philosophies of the day came from the Stoics and the Epicureans they both believed that life was basically meaningless and that in the end at your death you ceased to exist. There is nothing beyond this life. Each group though, took two totally different approaches to this philosophy. One said, “don't get too attached to anything, in order to be strong and unaffected by the world... as you kiss your children remind yourself that they will be dead soon and so will you...” The other group said, “Let's just live it up, life without any care for anything except your own personal pleasure... eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die..” Both are incredibly dismal and totally selfish ways to live.one is all about protecting yourself, and the other is all about self indulgence. This actually isn't too far from the way people live in a secular society like ours - if like secular humanism says we've come from nowhere then we are progressing to nowhere, there is nothing beyond this life. We are random pieces of matter who have no purpose or true place in the world. Whatever meaningfulness we place on life and relationships are really just

chemicals firing in our brains - they have no greater purpose, no true meaning or depth. The basically who says that we can't just live totally selfishly... Its no wonder that there are people flocking to ISIS - at least they give them something to believe in, something to live for, something to die for. (not that I think this is right or true, but I get it, I understand the appeal) Secular humanism has taken all the power and purpose out of western society - What hope can you have for life if it's all meaningless chemical reactions? Why even face life's hardships? Why commit yourself to anyone or anything -Life has no power, no meaning, no hope.

6. But then maybe like Lydia you come to religion. You want the meaning you want the hope but you find with it - a weight, a righteous standard that you cannot possibly live up to. As we said religion says do- and you will be accepted.
7. Even as the last section Peter describes the Jewish people as not being able to bear the weight of the Mosaic law... I wonder if Lydia was feeling that weight herself, feeling the burden. We know that Paul's theme when he is speaking to a Jewish or God fearing audience is that Jesus Christ fulfilled all righteousness for us, and simultaneously took our sin upon himself. He was cursed in order that we might have his righteousness and his blessing, this is a message of incredible hope and optimism about the world. God is not just the high God who created us and demands perfect righteousness from us in order to experience life in the age to come - eternal life, but he is also the God who came down and made that possible for all who believe in him. We were so wicked and lost that God himself had to come down from heaven and find us and give his life to save us; but we were so loved and valued by him he was willing and happy to do it.
8. We're told that as Paul spoke with the group - The Lord opened her heart to respond or pay attention to what Paul was saying." Tim Keller said in his sermon that the word "respond" or "Pay attention" is a Greek word that means to be attracted to; it's even used in one passage for someone who gets addicted to wine. So what it means is that Lydia became attracted to the message of the Gospel - She didn't just believe it was true, she found it irresistibly wonderful. This is when the gospel really begins to radically change your life, when you don't simply believe its true but when it's beauty has captured

your heart. Lydia - A woman who sells beautiful things to beautiful people had seen an irresistible beauty in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1. What can we learn about the gospel from someone like Lydia - Someone as beautiful, creative, independent, religious and successful as Lydia still lacks hope that only the Gospel can give you.. Through the Gospel God offers us a true and lasting hope, because no matter how beautiful, successful, creative independent, or religious you are, you can never keep it up, it will all fade, it can't last, you can't take it with you when you die...
2. The Gospel is a message of incredible hope. Fredrick Bruner says, "Life exists, in the Gospel's conviction, where there is no longer the abysmal dread of death, the awful weight of guilt, the horrid emptiness of meaninglessness, the lifeless absence of God, and the futile quest of the worlds multiple gods and idols. Life is present wherever Jesus, and all that he means, is appreciated and finally trusted." -Bruner

2. A slave girl and the power of the Gospel

1. **"As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.**
2. On another sabbath, perhaps the following week, Paul and his companions are on their way to the place of prayer again, and they encounter a slave girl. Luke tells us two things about this slave girl -
 1. She had a spirit by which she predicted the future or literally, she had a spirit of a python or a python spirit.
 1. The reference is to the snake of classical greek mythology who guarded the temple of Apollo and the Delphic oracle at Mount Parnassus. Apollo was thought to be embodied in the snake and to inspire 'pythonesses', his female devotees with clairvoyance, although other people thought of them as

ventriloquists. The Spirit of the Python was said to direct these woman by overpowering them allowing them to foretell the future...

2. She followed Paul and his companions, crying out, **“These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”** ¹⁸ **And this she kept doing for many days.**
3. Let's break it down. This girl talks in shrieking voices and probably deep male voices (which is the meaning behind the word ventriloquist)- it's like the exorcist. If we saw this girl today we would think she was mentally ill, and she would be institutionalized; but there is another aspect to what is going on here, a spiritual aspect. She through some spiritual demonic power can predict the future (fortune telling) and her owners make a lot of money off of her abilities.. She isn't just mentally ill, speaking in shrieking and deep male voices, she is demon influenced or possessed.
4. If Lydia is a high end fashion designer that makes beautiful clothes for beautiful people, this girl is like schizophrenic crack prostitute - the spectrum or contrast between these two could not be greater and yet both need Jesus and the saving power of the gospel..
5. Demonic oppression or possession is not actually as far fetched or as uncommon as we think. It can manifest itself in voices that we hear that condemn us, tell us we're worthless, that no one like us or loves us, tell us that we are trash, that we should kill ourselves. - I remember reading the testimony of a girl that had a voice that told her -you are a dirty girl who does dirty things, you will never be clean or pure...
6. It can manifest itself in voices that tell us to cut ourselves or do other self harm - this is what Legion did - the demoniac in Mark's gospel - where does this kind of behavior, voice or influence come from??
7. Some people roll their eyes at this and think that this is just superstitious nonsense but that's because they're not really taking a good look within themselves to see the evil of their own hearts or the evil without - can you really blame all the evil in the world on nature and nurture? If so I don't think you're being honest or have taken a good look at the world around you.Plus there are so

many personal, spiritual, encounters that people have had that science simply cannot explain...

8. Demonic power, demon influence or oppression is a real thing.. the devil has great knowledge and power and he has been around a long time... The Bible teaches that though Yahweh is the true and living God - there are many gods -demonic entities that influence people, and culture who incite evil, chaos and destruction.. seriously Mick Jagger was dead on when he wrote sympathy for the devil...
9. It says, **“Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.”** The word annoyed means to be greatly distressed but most translate it as annoyance. John Stott says, “it is better to understand that Paul was grieved, indeed indignant, because of this poor girl's condition, and also dismayed by this inappropriate and unwelcome kind of publicity.” Whether or not Paul was grieved or annoyed God used it to set this girl free. Paul speaks the name of greatest power and authority over all things. The name of Jesus! He transfers this poor girl from whatever demonic power is holding her to a power that nothing on earth, in heaven or hell can thwart or compare - the power of the resurrected Lord Jesus!
1. This poor little girl is in some sense a picture of every single one of us she is someone who is in bondage - a literal slave to her demons and her masters, and yet she is attracted to the light of God's Gospel... she's Jekyll and Hyde, she's Gollum, she is drawn to the light but totally helpless and enslaved to do anything to be free... It is only by an act of sheer grace and divine power that she is set free; and that combination is only found in Jesus Christ. Everyone of us is exactly the same we are addicted to sin and enslaved to idols and it is only by a supernatural intervention from the spirit of God that we can be set free. Jesus Christ has confronted our sin and unrighteousness, our slavery and our demons and offered us his righteousness by grace and now we are set free.. we weren't looking for God he came and found us and rescued us..

3. How can the beauty and the power of the gospel come to Lydia, and the slave Girl? How can the beauty and power of the Gospel come to us? Only because Jesus the high and exalted one lost all beauty -As Isaiah the prophet said -“he had no form or comeliness, no beauty that we should desire him...”

1. Only because Jesus who was the omnipotent God was stripped of all power can we be set free from the power of whatever enslaves us...
2. See everyone one of us knows, whether we're like Lydia, the slave girl or somewhere in between, that deep down inside something is wrong with us, whether it's because something has been done to us or we have done things to others. Each of us are simultaneously complicit in the sin, evil and suffering in the world and also victims of sin, evil, and suffering. Jesus alone is our substitution - He has lived the righteous life that we owe to God and love that we owe to our neighbor, but he also took the judgment we deserve from God for the life of sin we do live. Whoever you are and whatever you have done Jesus is your substitute. Jesus is your ransom - because you were enslaved to sin; Jesus is your propitiation; Jesus is your expiation; Jesus is your righteousness; Jesus is your justification; Jesus is your redemption; Jesus is your reconciliation. Whether you are burdened and weighed down, empty and hopeless, enslaved and tormented Jesus offers you rescue by grace. Because it is all of grace this is Good news, because everyone needs it, and anyone can receive it.