

Philippians II –

Introduction: Preaching, Power, and Persecutions (Acts 16:13-24)

Introduction – Having received a night vision, Paul leads his small missionary team onto European soil to establish the first church at Philippi. But there is no Macedonian man to meet Paul; there doesn't even appear to be a synagogue to attend. And it isn't long before the fruit of finding God's plan for their lives means being beaten and thrown in a dark prison cell. The events that Luke records for us under the Holy Spirit's inspiration are given to us for our instruction. We are to see the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ at work.

Christ Preached (vv13-15) – It had been Paul's practice to always begin his work in a new city by going to the synagogue and preaching the gospel (Acts 13:5, 14, 14:1), a practice he generally would keep on this missionary journey as well (17:1, 10, 18:4). The gospel was for the Jew first (Rom 1:16) even though Paul was a missionary to the Gentiles. But there is apparently no synagogue in Philippi, and possibly no Jewish men at all. Down at a place of prayer a group of women who worship God are found, and Paul speaks to them. Here we meet Lydia of Thyatira.

The Preached Word – Lydia heard the Word (v14) and the Lord uses this to open her heart. This is the characteristic of the Word of God (Psalm 19:7-8, 119:93, 130). Men are brought from death to life by means of the Word (James 1:18, 1 Pet 1:22-23). Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17). Jesus teaches that we must hear His voice (John 10:16, 27) not simply His Word. Paul teaches that we must hear Christ, not simply the gospel, in the message (Rom 10:14-16). It is not simply about the content, but about the speaker. It is not simply hearing *about* Jesus, but hearing the voice of Jesus. We have not come to hear a man's lecture, rather, “*see that you do not refuse Him who speaks*” (Heb 12:25).

The Lord Opened Her Heart (v14) – It doesn't matter that Lydia had the best preacher of the day. The natural man cannot receive the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). The carnal mind hates God (Rom 8:7). Lydia, and everyone else who has come to faith, has done so by the active work of God.

The Effects of the Gospel – The saving effects of this new heart is that ‘she gave heed to the things spoken’, she was baptized, and she was generous and hospitable, especially to the servants of God.

Christ's Authority (vv16-18) – Some time later a slave girl possessed with the spirit of Python begins to follow Paul. She is a fortune teller and is making good money for her masters. She has another word for the crowd.

Fortune-Telling – It is amazing how interested people are in the things God has chosen not to reveal and how little interest people have for the things God has revealed. We know that every detail in life is planned (Eph 1:11), and for the believer, we have every confidence that all that occurs will be for our good (Rom 8:28). But if you do not have that confidence, the future is a great threat to you. It is no simple innocent past-time to seek the counsel of spirits. We are commanded to avoid them (Lev 19:31) for they are an abomination to God (Deut 18:10-12). Seeking to be a medium and seeking a medium were both capital offenses (Lev 20:6, 27).

Timothy was warned that such activity would occur in the latter days (1 Tim 4:1).

Silence and Release – Paul is annoyed even though what she is proclaiming is true. This was the same with Christ (Mark 1:24f).

Even though Satan may disguise himself as an angel of light, the Lord will have no marriage between darkness and light. Once again, we see the power of the Word and the name of Jesus Christ delivering one from bondage.

Christ's Persecution (vv19-24) – No matter that they had witnessed firsthand the mighty power of God. Their foolish hearts are only darkened in their rebellion. It is a smokescreen when someone says they would believe if only God would do a miracle.

False Righteousness (vv19-21) – These men seize Paul and Silas and bring them before the general public and the legal system. They know whose sympathies they will have. “These Christians threaten the loyalty to Rome, the peace of the colony, and the rule of law in their noble city.” Yeah, right.

The War at Hand (vv22-24) – Jesus had said that the casting out of demons demonstrated the arrival of the kingdom of God (Matt 12:28f). The enmity of the world and of the devil is against the gospel. Just like Christ, without a proper trial; without proper Roman jurisdiction, the men are beaten in public and thrown in prison (John 15:20). Later, from another prison, Paul will connect the work of faith and suffering for all believers, both as gifts from God (Phil 1:29f).

Conclusion – We should not be surprised if God answers prayers, opens the hearts of many and pours out His Spirit of holiness. And when this Light is brought against the darkness, there will be friction. This work of the gospel is a violent work, freeing men and women from bondage, and hardening those who will attack the gospel-senders. And even in this we can rejoice, for “great is your reward in heaven” (Matt 5:10-12).