

Jesus' People

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Date: 02 June 2024

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[0 : 0 0] reading is taken from the book of Acts chapter 16 beginning at verse 6. You can find that in page 1111 in the church Bibles. Acts chapter 16 beginning at verse 6.

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mycenae, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mycenae and went down to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, come over to Macedonia and help us. After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. From Troas, we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samathras. And the next day, we went on to Neapolis. From there, we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house. And she persuaded us. Once, when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She 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. She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed 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. When her owners 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 with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these 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 shaking. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 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.

[3 : 5 1] But Paul shouted, don't harm yourself. We are all here. The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 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 whole 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 household 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 household. When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order, release those men. The jailer told Paul, the magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace. But Paul said to the officers, they beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No, let them come themselves and escort us out. The officers reported this to the magistrates. And when they heard that Paul and

Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Thanks so much, Andy, for reading. And let me add my welcome to Simon's. It would be a great help if you'd keep your Bibles open at Acts chapter 16. So let's join together and pray and ask for God's help.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, which is alive and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, penetrating even the hardest of hearts. Would you speak to us powerfully then through the Holy Spirit, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I have a friend at the art school. She says, Jesus is okay for you. Church is okay for you. But not for me. No, thank you. You can keep Jesus for yourself. I'm not the Jesus type. Well, who, I wonder, is the unlikeliest person you can think of in your sphere of friends and acquaintances who's the unlikeliest person to come to Jesus?

[6 : 43] We're carrying on our series in Acts this evening. Last week, if you were here, you'll remember we're thinking about what you need to be saved. The gospel equals faith in Jesus. You're saved by believing in Jesus, trusting in him alone for salvation. The gospel's not faith in Jesus, plus or minus anything else. It's faith in Christ alone. Well, this week, we're thinking not about what, but who is saved.

And it's try church this evening. It may be that some of you here this evening are here for that, exploring the Christian faith, finding out for yourself what it's all about sort of thing.

Maybe you have the same reservations as my art school friends. Following Jesus is all right for some, but not for me. No, thank you. I'm not the Jesus type. Well, this is a great passage for all of us.

And one of its main messages is there isn't a Jesus type of person. Jesus deliberately pursues all sorts of unlikely people, very unlike each other. You can't imagine they'd get on with each other in this passage. He does it deliberately, wonderfully uniting us into his one family.

We've got two headings this evening if you want to follow along. Firstly, the mission that Jesus directs. And then the people that Jesus pursues. So the first, firstly, then the mission that Jesus directs.

[8 : 18] Sometimes the book of Acts is referred to as the Acts of the Apostles. Maybe you've heard that, and you can see why the Apostles, guys like Peter and Paul, take part in much of the action.

But really, it's Jesus. He's the one running the show. He's the one who lives and reigns today and throned in glory. He's the one who's directing the action. So instead of the Acts of the Apostles, it's better maybe to think of it as the Acts of the risen Lord Jesus. He's the one driving all the action through the Holy Spirit. And we see that really clearly in verses 6 to 12. Jesus is the one directing his mission. And he does it here in quite extraordinary ways, both negatively and positively.

Negatively closing some doors and positively through a vision. And we've got a map. And to get our bearings, if you remember the end of last week, end of chapter 15, Paul and Barnabas had a bit of a barney. They fell out over whether or not to take Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, with them.

But Jesus is directing the mission. He uses even human shortcomings to advance the gospel. So now there's two teams instead of one. Barnabas and John Mark take the gospel to Cyprus. And Paul and Silas head around the mainland to Derby. And then Lystra picking up Timothy on the way. And then if you follow from verse 6 of chapter 16, Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

We see that on the map. No entry to Asia. Not the continent, but that particular part of modern-day Turkey. And it can be a bit like that, trying to get onto the M8 around here. You want to go this way, but then all of a sudden there's a no entry sign. Inexplicably, there's no entry.

[10:32] There's a diversion. Might get you to where you want to. Some of the time, very often not. But Paul and Silas change plan and head north, verse 7. When they come to the border of Mycenae, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them. Again, no entry. So they passed by Mycenae and went down to Troas. So again, they're stopped in their tracks. Their plan is thwarted.

Jesus is directing the course of the gospel, hemming them into where he wants them to be. And then at last comes positive direction in verse 9. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia begging him, come to Macedonia and help us. After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So Macedonia is in Europe, modern-day Greece. Previously, the gospel hadn't been to Europe. So this is another gospel first in the book of Acts. We can follow in the map from Troas. They sail to the island of Samothrace or Samothrace. Looks like a pretty nice island, but that doesn't stop them. They're not distracted. They go on to Neapolis and then to Philippi, which we're told, verse 12, is a Roman colony and the leading city in that region. And so for Paul and Silas, etc., it's Proverbs 16, 9 in action, isn't it? It's the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. That's their lived-out experience. The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. So Jesus is the one directing the missionaries exactly where he wants them, exactly the people he wants them to reach. And so then we're introduced to three individuals, three unlikely people that Jesus pursues. And so this is our second heading, the people that Jesus pursues. I've labeled them seeker, spiritual person, maybe better to say spiritually oppressed and secular. So firstly, the seeker in verse 13. If you follow along with me again. On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river. We sat down and began to speak to the woman who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Teotira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. So this is Lydia, an absolute legend. And she's a high-flying businesswoman, a Middle Eastern woman. If you put the map back up for a second. She's from Teotira, just in that region of Asia there, modern-day Turkey.

So she's an outsider in Philippi. And she's a dealer in purple cloth. So she's wealthy, we're told. She's got a large house, large enough to fit the whole of the church and for them to meet there. We see that from the end of the chapter. And she's a worshiper of God. So she's not a Jew, but a God-fearer. She's somebody who reads the Old Testament scriptures, searches the scriptures.

Someone genuinely interested in seeking God, seeking truth. Well, at St. Silas, we're, as most of you know, planning to send a team of missionaries to the east end of Glasgow to plant a church there. And as I've been studying this passage, I've been trying to imagine what these individuals we meet in this passage, what their modern-day equivalent might be. So you can take this or leave it. But you can imagine a modern-day Lydia working for Butte Fabrics or something like that, living in Deniston, maybe the fancy part of Deniston, the drives.

[14 : 39] Maybe one in the standalone villas there. Maybe she got in before the prices skyrocketed. But Lydia is open, spiritually speaking, and religious even. But however devout she is, however devout she may be, she still needs the gospel. She still needs a miracle. And that's exactly what comes in verse 14. A miracle. End of verse 14. The Lord opens her heart to respond to the gospel. This is Jesus' work in her life. And just as Jesus was involved in directing the missionaries to exactly the right spot that he wanted them to be at in Philippi, Jesus was also involved on the other side of the equation, opening up Lydia to be able to respond positively to the gospel. So we read verse 15, when she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.

If you consider me to be a believer in Jesus, she said, come and stay at my house. And she persuaded us. She becomes a Christian and opens up her home. Well, Rosario Butterfield has written a book about this.

It's called *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, about Christian hospitality. She writes, Christians who live out radically ordinary hospitality see their homes not as theirs at all, but as God's gift for the furtherance of his kingdom. Well, Lydia opens her door for the gospel. She invites people to join and eat with her. And she does hospitality, like so many of us here. And in our prayers at the 930 service this morning, we were giving thanks for Simon's seemingly endless hospitality, which is sadly coming to an end for us, our loss, Sir Andrew's gain. And that's what we do, isn't it? We open up our homes. We invite other Christians, brothers and sisters, people seeking the gospel into, share meals together and share God's word with one another.

Right, so up to now, it's going pretty well, isn't it, for Paul and Simon. It's been a good advert for becoming a missionary. It's been a good advert for joining our church plant in the East End. You move to Deniston, you discover it's not too bad at all, really not too shabby, not at all all that different from the West End, really. You've got a bit of cafe culture there, Deniston barbecue, places like that.

You're meeting up at Salinas with creatives, fashionistas like Lydia for flat whites and one-to-one Bible studies. So up to this point, it's not too bad at all. But here's where it gets just a little bit more gritty, comes back down to earth with a bump. And we're introduced in verse 16 to this spiritually oppressed person. So reading along in verse 16, And so here we meet this woman. We're not told her name, but she's spiritually oppressed. In fact, she's doubly oppressed because she's enslaved not just by an evil spirit, but enslaved by human owners. There's maybe a backstory of the occult here, how she's got into fortune telling. But anyway, she's captive and oppressed in multiple ways. We've got different forms of enslavement, don't we, in Glasgow today. Certainly there's people in Glasgow who are trapped in human trafficking.

[18 : 39] Govan Hill is a center for human trafficking like that. But there's also enslaving addictions, addictions to drugs, to alcohol, pornography, and some mental health issues that people can have an enslaving grip by. Well, this girl's in a rut. Little hope, little prospect for a brighter future.

And if we were to put her in our own East End context here, again, you can take this or leave it. But she's maybe the other side of the Bell Grove Railway across the invisible divide like that between what a friend who lives there describes as the not too stabby and the quite stabby parts of Deniston. I think he was exaggerating. So don't worry, Jamie, having just moved to Deniston. But South Deniston or the Carlton.

And maybe this woman is enslaved to dealers or to loan sharks. Maybe she dabbles in the new age. Not exactly seeking like Lydia, but certainly spiritually aware. And she's got this evil spirit in her, causing her to disrupt and provoke the missionaries in verse 17, shouting, These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved.

She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed 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.

Just like that. It came out. Another miracle. Another absolutely brilliant moment in this passage. All these years oppressed, helpless, absolutely nothing that she can do about it. And now, just in a word, set free by Jesus.

[20 : 47] We're not told much more about her. Not explicitly told even if she became a Christian. But when I was chatting to Alice, my wife, about it, she said it reminded her of a testimony she'd heard on a podcast of a famous tattoo artist, Kat Von D. Now, I'd never heard of her, but apparently tattoo artist to celebrities in L.A.

And so, this former occultist, Kat Von D., went viral on social media when she posted a video of her baptism, explaining that she'd given up witchcraft and that she'd become entangled in and put her trust in Jesus.

We don't find out about the slave girl in Philippi, because immediately the focus turns to the reaction against the gospel and the chaos that ensues in verse 19.

So now this evil spirit is gone. She can't tell the future. So verse 19, now her owners 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 the city into uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.

[22 : 13] So we know the real reason they've lost their income, but they know the easiest way to get rid of them is to appeal to people's suspicion of outsiders.

And verse 22, the crowd joined in the attack and they were stripped and beaten with rods. After they'd been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison. No trial, no process of justice here in the gospel starts to make inroads.

Lots of people don't like it and they don't like the change it brings. Well, Lydia's household became Christians. They became hospitable to the gospel, practicing hospitality themselves.

The slave girls' household become anti-Christian, inhospitable to the gospel, openly hostile. Throwing into jail is the very opposite of hospitality.

And so you can imagine a similar dynamic at play if a sex worker is converted to Christ and puts their trust in Jesus. What if their boyfriend was pimping them out to fund his own substance abuse?

[23 : 25] Suddenly his own income stream is gone. Do you think he's going to be best pleased? Or do you think he's going to go after the Christians with a vengeance?

Well, it's possible that he could see the gospel change in his partner and become a Christian too. The passage shows it can go either way. But Paul and Silas are banged up behind bars.

They're putting stocks in the inner cell. And from a human perspective, this isn't looking too clever for Paul and Silas, is it? But it is the means by which Jesus uses to reach the final character.

Remember, Jesus is directing the whole thing. So we've had Lydia the seeker, the slave girl, spiritually oppressed. Now we meet the secular, cynical, skeptical jailer.

And according to the commentators, very likely he was an ex-Roman soldier. So if you want the modern Glaswegian equivalent, he probably works in Barlini prison, known locally as Bar Hell.

[24 : 30] Born and raised in Brighton or Hag Hill, maybe ex-military, union flag in his window. No nonsense. You're not going to want to mess with this one. And unlike these women, he doesn't seem to be seeking anything spiritual at all.

Probably doesn't care about religion at all. All that's about to change. Verse 25. So about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.

And the other prisoners were listening to them. I love this bit. No doubt they were listening. You're probably wondering, what on earth are these guys on? I'll have some of what they're having.

Well, suddenly there was a violent, such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once, all the prison doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose.

So once again, we see Jesus getting involved at every stage of the story. He didn't just get the missionaries exactly where he wanted them. Jesus opens up Lydia's heart to the gospel.

[25 : 35] Verse 14. Jesus' name breaks the power of darkness in the girl. Verse 18. Now it's Jesus again orchestrating it. Sending this earthquake, presumably in answer to their prayers.

As Jesus shakes the earth and the doors spring open, the chains are broken. Now let's be honest here. If this was me or you, this would be our cue to make a sharp exit, wouldn't it?

You'd do a runner probably, wouldn't you? We'd see an opportunity to escape. Paul and Silas saw an opportunity for evangelism.

Jesus has plans for this jailer. So verse 27. The jailer woke up and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. In those days, if the prisoners escaped, he'd be executed.

So it's this desperate. The only way he sees out is to end his own life. But all that changes very quickly again. Verse 28. Paul shouted, don't harm yourself. We're all here.

[26 : 38] And the jailer rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. So this is a major turnaround for the jailer. The fear of execution is no longer the thing that occupies his worry.

It's replaced with a very different sort of fear. Whatever happened that night to him, never mind the earthquake, Jesus has gotten hold of him and his shaking his very soul.

His whole understanding of reality is turned upside down and inside out. And so he asks the big question in verse 30. What must I do to be saved?

So we need to ask ourselves at this point, what has got under the skin of this unsentimental, secular jailer? What's got into him?

Why is he talking about salvation like that? Is it the midnight hymns he'd heard singing? Was he shaken by the earthquake?

[27 : 41] Or was it the behavior of Paul and Silas, how they conducted themselves, probably all of the above? They've been beaten, tortured, locked up.

Who are these people singing? What do they have that I don't have? Why are they responding like this? And they treat the jailer with mind-blowing kindness, despite the way that they've been treated by him themselves.

They get there in just the nick of time and stop him from taking his life, and then they stick around to tell him how he can be saved eternally. So look with me at verse 30. They replied, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

You and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. So this is the gospel. Believe in the Lord Jesus.

Trust in him alone for your salvation, and you will be saved. It's that simple, and it's that glorious.

[28 : 57] You can't earn it. You just have to accept it. And the change in him is immediate, verse 33. At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds.

Then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He was filled with joy because he'd come to believe in God.

He and his whole household. So this is amazing, isn't it? This is quite extraordinary. The whole household as well, they can see the change in him right away.

It shows hospitality to them, just like Lydia did, practicing hospitality as an outflow of the gospel. Well, before Paul and Silas and the others leave Philippi, we see two more things, just briefly.

Firstly, the reputation of the gospel is publicly vindicated. The magistrates come in to release them. They want to brush the whole thing under the carpet. But Paul's not having any of it, verse 37.

[30 : 00] Paul said, They beat us up publicly without a trial, even though we're Roman citizens. And now do they want us to go quietly? No, let them come themselves and escort us out.

So Paul wants the whole city to know that they're not troublemakers, that the reputation of this fledgling church plant in Philippi is intact.

Secondly, the climax of the chapter. So we see already that Jesus' people, this unlikely, improbable, assorted bunch of believers, start meeting together as Europe's first church.

Look at verse 40. After Paul and Silas came out of prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters, and encouraged them.

Well, isn't this amazing? Because after Jesus pursues unlikely people, who really couldn't be any more different from each other, just after Jesus pursues these unlikely people, he then unites us into one family, into one household.

[31 : 16] And right away, Lydia, a new believer, using our home as a blessing for others. And you can imagine the first thing the neighbors notice is they're sort of twitching at their sheer curtains.

What's this strange company Lydia's now keeping? Have you seen them? Straying onto our respectable patch. She seemed so normal.

What else happened to her? The gospel of Jesus breaks down these barriers, breaks down these walls, reaches across the divide, remakes people into a new humanity, Jesus' people.

And as we close, just a couple of things for us to reflect on and to take away from this passage. Firstly, the gospel is unstoppable. Jesus is at work, directing his mission today, pursuing his people here in Glasgow, gathering them into his household.

Yes, there's obstacles. Yes, they're very real. And yes, there's anti-Christian sentiment in this city. But ultimately, I think this passage shows the gospel wins so we can keep going with confidence.

[32 : 30] And I think we're meant to take real encouragement from that. Second thing is the gospel is for everyone. Literally for everyone.

The good news of this passage is there's no such thing as a Jesus type of person. And Lydia and the slave girl and the jailer are just so very different.

Different ethnicity, different socioeconomical backgrounds, different backstories, different baggage that they've got. It's not one size fits all.

Jesus meets them very graciously, very sensitively, where they're at individually, in a way that relates to them personally. And Lydia, she's already reading the Bible.

Jesus opens her heart to the gospel. That's what she needs. The slave girl's different. She needs deliverance. Jesus comes and delivers her from the spiritual oppression that she's been suffering from all her life.

[33 : 34] And the jailer, well, he needs a massive wake-up call, doesn't he? Different stories, each of them. But all of them pursued by the same Jesus.

All of them Jesus' people. So if you're not sure about Jesus, even the very fact that you're here may be evidence, according to this passage, that he is the one pursuing you, even now.

And if that's you, he's the one who can open your eyes to the gospel. He's the one who can deliver you from the chains of oppression in your life. He's the one who can release you from guilt and shame.

The one who may just be giving you that very wake-up call this evening. There's room for all sorts in Jesus' household.

People like Lydia, people like the slave girl, and Kat Von D, people like the jailer, people like you and me. He pursued us, and so we too can take the gospel of Jesus to the unlikeliest of people.

[34 : 39] So let's pray to that end. Lord Jesus, we marvel that you pursue and save people from all sorts of different backgrounds.

This is truly amazing grace. We pray that in your mercy, you would revive this city by pouring out your spirit. Would you enable and empower us to share the gospel with those you've placed around us, that you direct us to those who need to hear your word, that even the unlikeliest would be spiritually awakened to see the goodness and the truth of the gospel.

So we ask it in your name. Amen. We're going to respond now by singing.