

# Acts 16:16-40: Can Jesus' Power Transform the Best and Worst Among Us?

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## I. Introduction

Do you remember the day you met Jesus? What were you looking for, a pardon, a happier life, rest from the pressure and anxiety? Did you find it or are you still living a life of anxiety and pressure? Jesus came to set you free, whether you're rich or poor, addict or strait-laced, spiritual or not, He came to transform you, to set you on a new path.

## II. Acts 16:16-40: Jesus Came to Free the Oppressed, to Free the Captives...Are You One of Them?

**16:16-18**, after the Lord spoke to Lydia through Paul's words, Lydia and all her household believed in Him and she then offered Jesus all that she possessed, i.e., Lydia insisted that Paul and his companions use her house as their headquarters during their stay in Philippi. Having established a home base in Philippi, they continue evangelizing. On one of those outings, a little slave girl possessed by a spirit capable of telling the future—who made her masters a lot of money—followed them crying out, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And she kept doing this for days.

This culture believed in many gods. And they specifically believed that this little girl was possessed by a spirit of Pytho(n) (as it states in the original Greek). In Pytho, better known as Delphi, lived the Delphic oracle who was known to tell the future. Legend has it that she'd been given this power by the god Apollo, who slayed the Python (serpent or dragon who guarded the Delphic oracle). Thus, to say that someone had a spirit of Pytho(n) was a common way of saying that they had a spirit of divination. But notice what the Lord does here: the people believe she can tell the future because Apollo, the god of prophecy, enabled her. But what does Jesus command the demon to say? He has the demon point to the only true God, the God of heaven and earth, the only One who knows the way of salvation! Then Jesus proves who the real God is by removing the demon from the little girl as He has Paul cast it out in His name. What is Jesus saying to the people of Philippi, to the little girl, to her masters, to the newly planted church in Philippi.....what's He saying to us?

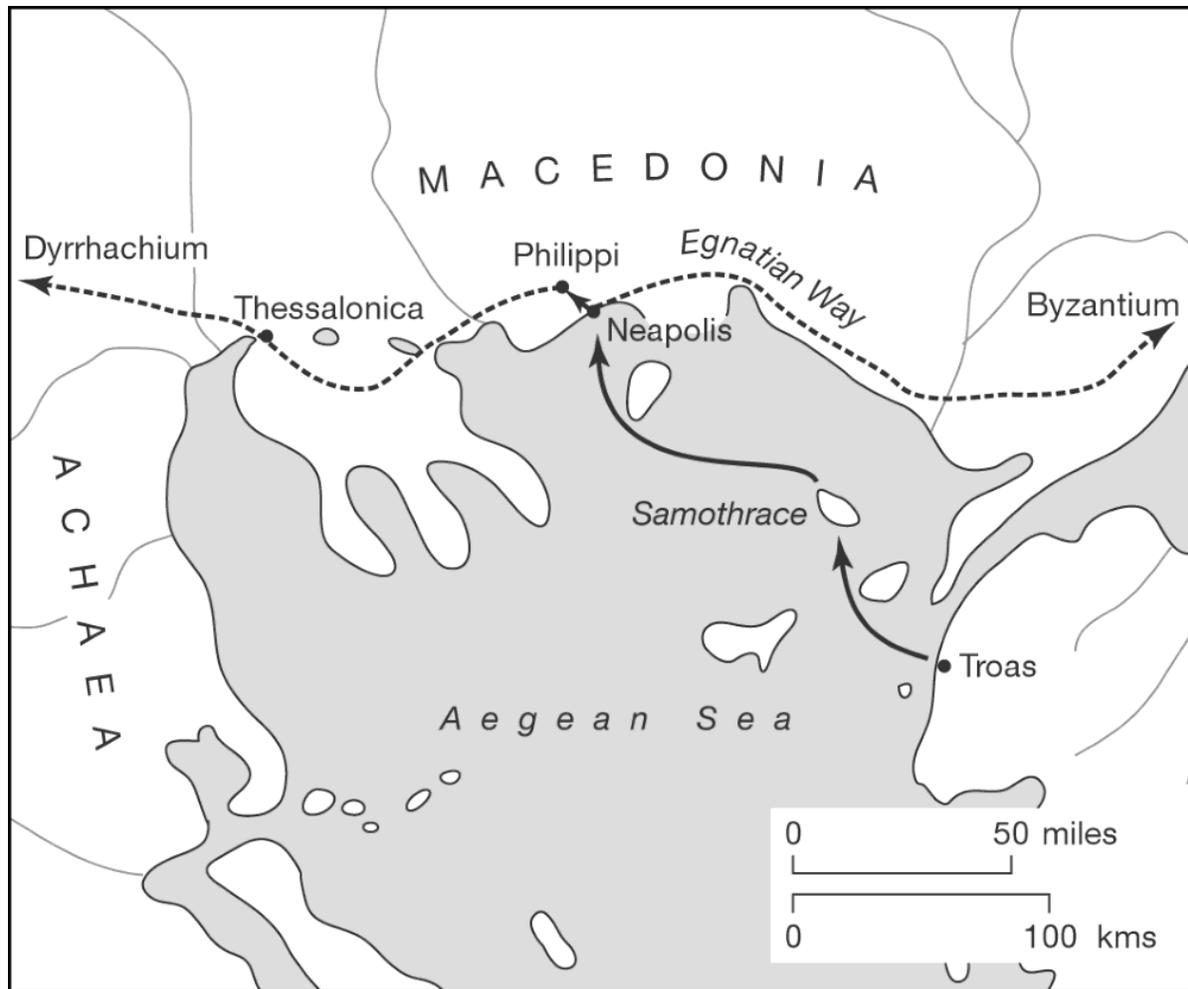
**16:19-24**, Jesus came to disrupt the normal order of our culture and society, to unveil the darkness that's overpowered it, but that darkness will not like it. Thus the masters of the little girl are furious that their main financial asset has been taken from them. So they seize Paul and Silas and bring them to the authorities. Their charges are laced with anti-Semitism and patriotic fervor. They use love of country and hate for foreigners to turn the mob against Paul and Silas and it works. This mob act may've been aided by the fact that recently (49 AD) Claudius Caesar expelled all Jews from Rome for causing a religious disturbance. A Roman colony like Philippi would often follow Rome's example. Instead of administering justice, the magistrates are willingly swept up in this mob action and give orders for Paul and Silas to be stripped, beaten, and imprisoned. Each magistrate had lector(s)/officers/soldiers who would carry out their orders; they carried a bundle of rods symbolizing the magistrate's office and power to punish. They, perhaps along with some in the mob, strip and beat Paul and Silas. After beating them with many stripes, which would've left them bruised, bloodied, and possibly worse, they throw them in prison commanding the jailer to make sure they don't escape. The jailer, who was likely a hardened ex-military man, adds insult to injury by putting them in the inner prison—which has no daylight or fresh air—and fastening their feet to the stocks, which were used to torture prisoners; it forced their legs apart.

**16:25-26**, bloodied, beaten and tortured by the stocks, Paul and Silas do something miraculous, something that changes everything. Normally, the other prisoners would've heard moans of painful anguish and angry cries of injustice from these unjustly beaten and condemned men. But instead, out of that dark and dingy inner prison, they hear prayers and singing to God. This was so astounding that it captivated the other prisoners. They could not believe what they heard. What praises do you suppose Paul and Silas made to God? What requests did they make of God concerning their situation and those who ill-treated them? We have an idea from God's answer: He sends an earthquake which sets Paul, Silas, and all the other prisoners free! The Lord is sending a message to the jailer, the other prisoners, the magistrates, Paul and Silas, and all of Philippi.

**16:27-34**, the jailer is wakened by the earthquake and quickly realizes that every cell door is open. Assuming that all the prisoners fled, he drew his sword to kill himself because those responsible for prisoners were executed if one escaped (Acts 12:18-19). Paul could see what was about to happen, so he yells out, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" What made the other prisoners stay in their cells? What made Paul and Silas stay in their cells? They could've repaid this jailer for his torture; all they had to do is escape and he would've been dead. But instead they stayed and so did the rest. Why? Because the Lord sent Paul and Silas to save the lost not to execute them. The other prisoners realized that the God of Paul and Silas was real; this was not Apollos. This God answered your prayers. This God died for you in order to save you. This God forgave you and gave you the ability to forgive those who torture you. The jailer, this hardened ex-military man, falls down before Paul and Silas trembling and says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He may've heard about the slave girl's words about Paul and Silas, that they served the Most High God and knew the way of salvation. He may've heard some of Paul and Silas' singing and praying. Or he may've still feared for his life. Either way, Paul and Silas do what they came there to do, save the lost. So they point the jailer and his household to the way of salvation: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So the jailer and all his house believed in Jesus and were baptized. Jesus then turns this hardened military man into a loving brother in the Lord. Previously the jailer tortured Paul and Silas in the stocks. Now, he compassionately treats their injuries and invites them to a meal with his family where they all rejoice together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

**16:35-40**, the next day, the magistrates—who may've come to their senses regarding their injustice—sent the lecturers/officers to release Paul and Silas. The jailer communicates this to Paul but Paul reveals something that now causes the magistrates to fear and tremble: they have publically humiliated and beaten two uncondemned Roman citizens! This kind of treatment was forbidden; it was illegal to inflict any form of scourging upon a Roman citizen. If Rome found out, the magistrates could lose their position or worse and Philippi could be in danger of losing its freedoms. Paul would have none of this so he called for them to come themselves and release them publically. When the magistrates heard this, they were terrified and immediately went, released them, and pleaded with them to leave the city. Paul and Silas leave the prison and return to Lydia's house, who is now hosting the newly planted church in Philippi. And they, the beaten and tortured, encourage the brethren in the church before departing. Why did Paul wait to reveal his citizenship? He was following his Master's footsteps: he was suffering for and protecting his flock, the Body of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23-28; Colossians 1:24; Philippians 1:12-18).

**What's God saying to the best and worst among us.....what's He saying to you?** What did the people of Philippi see when they saw Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy? They saw an ex-Pharisee, a crazy doctor, a religious nut who thinks he's a prophet of God, and a naïve young man named Timothy who's following them around. Who are they now that they've encountered Christ? Who was Lydia, the little slave girl, and the jailer before they met Christ and who are they now?....Jesus can transform anyone, will you allow Him to transform you?



### III. Conclusion

And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

<sup>1</sup> Wright, T. (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13-28* (p. 60-61). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.