

The Courage of Paul
Acts 16:35-40

So, turn with me if you will to Acts chapter 16. We're going to finish up Acts chapter 16 today, and I want to not just tell you about things that you already know (and that's hard because you know a lot of stuff), so I have to kind of search around the bowels of the Internet sometimes to come up with something you don't know. There's a guy, he was a Texan, in 1995 in Dallas... think it was September of 1995, in the middle of the night, early hours of the morning, he called the police station in Dallas and threatened President Clinton. So, he's going to kill President Clinton. Now, public service announcement here - you know when you do that sort of thing, it kind of creates a stir. It's remarkable how many times this happens. Actually, you know, every day there's upwards of thirty times where somebody in some fashion threatens the president; usually, it's on Twitter. Oh, I hate the president. I should kill him or something like that, and it's not... nobody takes it that seriously, but guess what? The Secret Service gets involved in these sort of things, and they start to track you down. So, if you don't want the Secret Service butting into your life, don't threaten the President of the United States.

So, Horace Caraker, this Texan, phones in a phone call saying he's going to kill President Clinton, which triggers a series of events that basically lands him in jail. I think he knew this was coming because in 1983, in November of 1983, he threatened President Reagan. See, he's not just a right-wing Republican who hates Democratic Bill Clinton, he also threatened President Reagan and landed in jail. 1976 - he threatened to kill President Ford and landed in jail. No, he's not an early era Islamic terrorist. He might be mentally ill. You know, there's some evidence of that, but he actually had a history of being in prison. He first started in 1961 with this kind of larceny and burglary and jail and he'd be in jail and out of jail. He came to be fond of being in jail, and the best way to get in jail is you just threaten the President. In fact, it doesn't just get you in jail, it gets you in what he called "the Holiday Inn of prisons," the State Penitentiary. So, that's where he wanted to be, and he figured out a way to do it, and that's where he lived his life, in jail. So, that seems a little odd, you know, someone wanting to actually be in prison. Right?

Well, we get a text today, to look at in Acts chapter 16, of someone who's, actually, choosing to stay in jail and for a different reason than Horace Caraker was trying to stay in jail; his desires were entirely selfish and because he couldn't quite take the freedom of life for whatever reasons that is. So, let's read Acts chapter 16:35-40, and we'll see another fella who's staying in jail. Verse 35; "Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men [those men are Paul and Silas].'" And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.' But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.' The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed." And that ends the ministry at Philippi for Paul at this point.

So, trying to help you get kind of oriented before we look at why does he want to stay in prison and what's going on here. He's in prison in Philippi, and there's a series of events that led up to this. You know, the book of Acts is the story of the growth of the early church, and so it moves the ministry of the church geographically centered in Jerusalem for the first seven chapters and then moves to Judean Samaria which is the next chapters from 8-12 and then goes to the remotest part of the earth, and that starts in Acts chapter 13. (So, Acts 1:8 kind of orients us to the outline of the book.) And we see us now, starting in Acts chapter 13, moving to the remotest part of the earth which from Acts 13-14 was the remotest part of the earth being what we call present day Turkey, that is in the northern part of the Mediterranean, and now we're moving in Acts 15:36-18:23 - Paul's second missionary journey to Greece.

So, the first journey he took to modern day Turkey, and planted churches in towns such as Iconium, a city in Antioch, Lystra, Derbe - these towns - he began his second missionary journey to go and visit these people. He and Silas departed the town of Antioch (the city of Antioch is a large city at the time in Syria), left to visit places that he'd already been, but there was a vision of a man calling him to come to Macedonia. Macedonia is the

northern part of Greece, so he did. As he went through Turkey, in Lystra he picked up Timothy, so then, we had Paul, Silas, and then Timothy, and after he saw this vision, he was in Troas and took along Luke; so, then, we have four people. Luke happens to be the author of the book of Acts and the gospel of Luke, so the gospel of Luke's like, kind of, part one, and the Acts of the apostles are like part two of a two volume set. And Luke is a medical doctor, and as a medical doctor, he would be familiar with Philippi. It was a center of medical learning. Philippi is in Macedonia, northern Greece. It's on the northern coast of the Aegean Sea. So, most likely, they are in Philippi because of Luke, because of his familiarity with the city. So, they go to Macedonia, and of all the places they could go to in Macedonia they land in Philippi.

In Philippi, they go to Jewish people; that's the pattern we see. They go to synagogues. Unfortunately, this is a long way from Jerusalem, and there's not enough people even to have a synagogue. So, we just find some women meeting on the Sabbath by a river, the Gangites river, that ran through Philippi, and Paul preaches the gospel to these women and a woman named Lydia or possibly a woman from Lydia. Lydia was a region in the town where she was from, from the city of Thyatira, and the region was called Lydia; so, she may be a Lydian woman, but the translation I'm using, New American Standard, says "...a woman named Lydia ...". So, hey, we'll go with that - Lydia, call her that, and she's from Thyatira. She's a wealthy woman, and she's an importer of expensive fabrics, and she becomes a believer with "...her and her household..."

And Paul continues to preach the gospel to people, and that created a controversy with this slave girl that was creating a disruption with his ministry because of a demon that had afflicted her. In casting out this demon, there's some masters that were not very happy with the economic ramifications of this casting out of this demon because it thwarted their business that they were gaining from this fortune-telling woman. So, the crowd that valued this rose up against Paul and Silas, and them being Jewish people that were not well thought of as Jewish people in the Roman Empire, had landed themselves in prison. Incidentally (kind of as a footnote here), there's only two places we will find Gentile people rising up to persecute the church, here in Philippi and later in Ephesus, for the Gentiles' reason. The Jewish had... you know, they're the people doing most of the persecution, the Jews, and they had their religious reasons for it. The Gentiles' reasons

for this was economic, and the economic disruption created a controversy, landing Paul and Silas in jail.

There was a jailor there who was supposed to be in charge of them. Well, an earthquake hit, and that resulted in the freedom of the chains from the walls and the stocks, and then the prisoners could, actually, flee if they so chose, but they didn't. Paul encouraging people to stay... and the Philippian jailor comes. He's seeing that they're not fleeing, and he's so taken back by this, Paul says, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" He's going to kill himself because that's a big deal. These people flee - he's then susceptible to the same penalties as they would have been. So, he, in his fear, says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And the clear explanation of the gospel Paul gives to him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

So, if you want to know in a nutshell how to communicate the gospel message to the people around you, that's it. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." There's nothing else to do. There's no works that you need to do to make God happy with you, but it is belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone that brings salvation. So, through that, through those words, we have his household, that jailor's household, coming to faith and belief. So, we've got two notable converts. We've got this woman named Lydia who's a wealthy importer of expensive fabrics, and we have this jailor who has been a retired military man. You know, he would not be in this position in this Roman colony, a military town, without being at least, kind of, at the level of a centurion over a hundred men and maybe higher than that. These two people and their households, I think, they just testify to the diversity of the early church. They would not necessarily be associating with each other. They are representative of two different stations of life, but yet, now they've come together and are forming the church at Philippi. Don't miss the significance of these two people and how different they are.

So, there is, then, this earthquake. Right? and I kind of had to break up this story into three parts of this imprisonment because there's just too much going on here. So, two messages ago, we talked about how they landed in prison. Last time, we talked about them in prison. When they landed in prison, it was during the day. Then in the middle of the night, at midnight, there's this earthquake, and all this is transpiring in the middle of the night

of this salvation of this jailor and his household including the baptism of him and his household, which says something about baptism and how important it is. And now, it's the next day, verse 35, so, this is the third part. They were no longer in the middle of the night; "Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men.'" This wasn't kind of what you'd expect. The jailor didn't expect this freedom to be granted, this resolution of Paul and Silas should be freed; if so, he wouldn't be so concerned that they possibly had fled.

Why? Why do the magistrates change their minds and now are releasing them? Well, I think, it's because they're superstitious over the earthquake. That's why. This is a very common response of people to major upheavals is they think, oh, the gods must be telling us something, or God must be telling us. You know, there's been two times - and you, kind of, look at the history of our church, that I can tell from the attendance records that go back to the mid 70's - and there's two times where people, sort of, then came more, and one was with the Northridge earthquake, and the other time was of 9/11. You know, it's just something that sort of happens with people they, "Oh!" ...and they sort of respond. Now, unfortunately, the usual case is people just respond for the moment. It's a sort of a temporary sort of, oh, I might be needing to get connected to God or something, and what can I do to appease him? ...not genuine faith, but this sort of happens, this kind of superstition. I hope you're not like that - that you're not acting out of superstition over events of life, but that you're coming here this morning out of faith, out of belief in Jesus, and you're looking to follow Him, and you're interested in what He's saying.

So, these policemen that are summoned... he says to the policemen to "Release those men." Well, oh, I got to, like, give you my map of the earthquake area. You know Philippi has lots of earthquakes in this area. When I say lots, maybe not quite as much as, say, Japan, but if you look at Europe, you look at Africa, this is the kind of hot-bed of what you'd find in earthquakes. So, this is not unusual that we have earthquakes, but it does shake people up, and we see this. The policemen... literally, these are known as... directly translated would be... rod-bearers. They carried rods with axes attached. They're rather imposing people, so Paul is kind of responding to these people that, you know, they might be a little intimidating to you or me. They're likely, in fact, the same people that beat them up earlier in verses 22-23 and created the very wounds that needed to be cleaned and washed by

the Philippian jailor in verse 33. They are substantial individuals, and Paul, in spite of them, resists his freedom. He isn't willing to just capitulate, and that is surprising. You'd, kind of, think that he would see this as God working in the midst of the earthquake, and he's being freed; isn't that wonderful? What a blessing. That's not what he does. In fact, he makes a definite contrast between what had happened to him to arrive him in jail, verses what is happening to him to free him from jail.

Let's look at this next couple of verses and see this contrast in verses 36-37; where "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace." And Paul says, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." So, this contrast is they publicly put them in prison so the town will know that they are put in prison, but how do they try to release them? He says, "...sending us away secretly?" ...kind of out the back door so nobody knows about this? No, he doesn't go for that. That's one contrast, public putting in - secret letting them out. Another one, they were thrown in prison against they're will. Verse 24; then they "...threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." Now it's "...come out..." It's just an invitation. You guys "...come out..." The next thing is the beating. They beat them up, they create those wounds. Now it's a "... go in peace." The thugs are now bringing peace. Right? Well, not so fast. And the last one is, really, the crux of the matter; they personally threw them into prison. They were an active participant. Now Paul says, "No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." Don't just kind of send some other people to do this. You guys come and release us. So, that's this contrast he makes.

He also has this mention of men who are Romans. Now that's significant because if you are a Roman citizen, Roman law afforded you a public trial which didn't happen and, also, exempted you from degrading beatings. Yes, you could at some point after the trial (and there're certain circumstances) be beaten, but that didn't happen in Paul's case. So, he throws in there that they're Romans, and that is a significant thing. Why? Why did he wait? Some people assume, well, maybe, he told them this and they were so busy with the mob, they just ignored it. I don't think so. I don't think so because of how concerned they are in verse 38 when they hear they're Romans. They

didn't have this information, and now they're afraid; I don't think they had this information. I think Paul waited until after his release to effectively communicate about his citizenship.

So, the next question is why does he do this now? Why didn't he do this earlier to get himself out of the situation? Well, the scripture, really, isn't telling us the whys of this, but to try to make an educated guess, I believe that he needed to do this because, if he just accepted the secret release and the question of his innocence, it would not be publicly resolved. So, he is demonstrating to these people that he was improperly, immorally even, arrested, thrown in prison, and should not be in this situation, and he sort of took it for the sake of the church. Okay, this isn't just about him. You know, this is all true that he needed a public resolution to this, not a private resolution to this, because he could go out from here and be considered to be by some people a fugitive because this was not a public exoneration; it was a secret one.

But there's a much bigger thing going on here, and this is not so much about Paul, it's about the church. More importantly, a public exoneration was necessary in order to protect his fellow believers from this sort of mistreatment in the future because they might be susceptible to these same sorts of persecution, and he wanted an exoneration of the church - that what they did was okay, and they shouldn't be beaten up for it. The choice to do this now. to talk about the Roman citizenship stuff, it's kind of a choice by Paul, I think, to live out his faith according to the instruction of Jesus which was "...be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves." When He sent His disciples out in Matthew 10, he could've done this at a different time, but he chose to do this at this time. He could rightfully demand his rights at any time and say, hey, I'm a Roman citizen, but I think he calculated the time to do this now for the best benefit of the church. I think, wise and righteous living keeps the needs of others in view. He did this not just to serve himself but to position the church; for when he departed they would be in a better situation, having him be exonerated for the act of preaching the gospel. And he made this truth clear to guess who? ...the Philippians themselves later on.

A decade later after he's in another prison, he writes a letter to the Philippians, and in the letter to the Philippians, he makes this very point of don't look out for your own personal interest but also for the interests of others, Philippians 2:4. That is what's guiding Paul. That's what is the

example to us today, to not be doing whatever we do just because it pleases us but to have a mind toward the interest of others, and Paul did this even to his own hurt. Even to his own deficit he carried out that faith and taught that, later, to the Philippians. So, what happens? He says, “No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.” Guess what? That’s what they do. Verse 38; “The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out...” So, they’re trying to get rid of him; “...they kept begging them to leave the city.” So, this is interesting. You know, why are they so afraid of this?

Why are the magistrates so concerned that they’re Romans citizens? The very role of what the magistrate was supposed to be doing was to protect the Romans from injustice. The reason you have these people here in the first place as magistrates ruling over this military town is because, as the Roman Empire expanded, Roman citizens were in jeopardy, and their job was with the sword to protect the Romans, and here they were creating the very injustice that they were designated to be protecting people of. These magistrates, they were concerned that they had violated the law by ordering the beating of Paul and Silas, and they were trying to get out of this situation they found themselves by getting them to leave the city and get out of their hair. You know this sense of Roman citizenship is obviously a big deal, and it was such a big deal that, if you falsely claim to be a Roman citizen, they could kill you. You could prove this. There was a wooden token that was imprinted that, kind of, like your birth certificate that proves that you were born where you were born and proves that you are citizen of the United States; they had such a thing.

You know, people (like, you don’t carry around your birth certificate), they didn’t carry these around necessarily. They were safe. There was no question that the magistrate didn’t say, oh, you say you’re a Roman citizen, people just didn’t lie about this stuff because it could be tracked down and proven, and that’s why we’ll see this again, Paul’s appeal as a Roman citizen. So, they’re trying to get him to leave. They had the power to put him in prison. They had no power to free him. They tried to get him to leave quietly. Kind of funny... it’s maybe the early age of the peaceful resistance movement - what you find in the 20th century. So, they are stuck, “...begging them to leave the city.” See how the tables have been turned? They were in the place of power, and now, they’re pleading with them, appealing to them. There’s

some translations that... and this may be fair - it maybe a little too much... it's possible that a translation in verse 39 may say, and "...they came and apologized to them." ...like a public apology for putting them in prison unfairly. My translation says, "appealed." So, you look at this, and this act by Paul gives us something to resonate with.

We have a very "rights" driven society, don't we? We're very aware that we have certain inalienable rights as citizens, and we are very much likely to demand our rights and to get what we deserve as Americans. We don't suffer injustices lightly. We have the Bill of Rights and various rights afforded to us of a speedy trial and a lawyer and to bear arms and on and on. And it's been added to over the years of different rights that we have, and then there's the sense of other things that think we just sort of deserve like food or health care or this and that. So, we have a great sense of this. Paul was careful when he exercised his demand for his rights. There's a sense of meekness. There's a Christian character quality - for all of you Sparkys out there, the Christian character quality for this morning is meekness, not just demanding everything that is deserving for you but a willingness to put aside your rights for the sake of others and not just demand every last cent that you should get, every last honor that you... that's coming to you but a willingness for the sake of others to be deferential, meek is the Bible term; "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Because meekness understands that ultimately our reward is in heaven, and the Lord is fully able to rectify all the injustices. Like, if you want a place to understand our rights as citizens, there're times when an appeal to our rights of citizens of the government not only serves us but our fellow believers, like the freedom of speech, like the first right, the freedom of exercise of religion. Hey, that's a pretty important one. That, really, helps us out. I like that one even more than the other ones for the sake of the church.

But keep in mind what Paul taught the Philippians - the Philippians - in Philippians 3:20; "For our [real] citizenship is in heaven..." not on earth. When we keep that in mind, we become orientated well. That these things, these turmoils of this present earth are passing away, there for a time, and our eternal destiny is in heaven, and that's where our citizenship is - so we don't become quite so attached to all the things of this earth that afford us with our citizenship, and that's what Paul did. So, they're "...begging [Paul] to leave the city." And in verse 40; "They went out of the prison [having been appealed to or apologized] and entered the house of Lydia, and when

they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.” This place of Lydia’s house, that’s a central meeting area sort of. They didn’t have church buildings, obviously. In fact, they wouldn’t have church until for three hundred more years. The early 300s was when the Christian religion, actually, was no longer illegal to practice, and church buildings could be built. So, they met in a home, a larger home, because Lydia was, obviously, a successful business woman and could fit her household, the jailor and his household, and other people, undoubtedly, who’d come to faith as well as Luke and Timothy and now Paul and Silas. Paul is able to stay long enough to encourage the church, and what we learn from the book of Philippians is his ministry would remain. This time and place in Acts 16 is about 50 AD, probably, maybe, the fall of 50 AD.

The book of Philippians would be written, oh, about twenty, no, excuse me, twelve years later, and from the book of Philippians, we find what transpires from this church. Paul’s departing, and he’s leaving what looks like not much behind, not a lot of strength here, but God is faithful in working through this church. So, as we look at the book of Philippians later, Paul writes, “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons...” (so then they have now a structure, they have elders, they have deacons, they have a leadership of this church) “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.” So, from this time in Acts chapter 16, the Philippians were participating in the gospel and that continued for twelve years until Paul in another prison is writing them. Verse 6; “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” He had great confidence that Christ would continue to work in them to develop the church and so have that happen.

So, I’d like to read you the whole book of Philippians. Oh, I can’t, so I’m just going to give you some excerpts that you can learn about this church. It was a successful church that faced persecution, the same persecution that Paul ended up facing; “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” So, these attempts by Paul to help them only lasted for a time and eventually it was granted to

suffer for Christ's sake. Jesus said this in Matthew 5:10-12; "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great..." They would see false teachers come their way, and he warns them: beware of the dogs, of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision, beware of people that teach falsely. They're a normal church that have people that are teaching bad things from time to time that they needed to correct. They had relational problems. Philippians 4:2; "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." They were a normal church. They had people that ended up in conflict with each other, and they needed encouragement. They were a normal church that would face attitude problems, and they needed to be encouraged to "Rejoice in the Lord always..." They had to be encouraged to "Be anxious for nothing...", to look "...on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." ...by looking at "...whatever is true, whatever is honorable..." They needed to be encouraged in chapter 2:14; "Do all things without grumbling or disputing..."

So, how did God work this out? ...by His Spirit. He was faithful to them, and He did this though Luke. Acts 20:5 tells us a pronoun that says "we." So, we lose the "we" pronoun in Acts chapter 16. We have a "we" pronoun that clearly says Luke was a part of the church in Philippi, but after here, we no longer get the pronoun "we" until Acts 20:5, and we see that it's evident that when Paul comes back to this church, Luke rejoins him. So, we have Luke who's able to minister to this church. It would be another five years before Paul would return to Macedonia in Acts chapter 20, and he would be rejoined with Luke. So, the very writer that's writing this was able to minister to this people, and the church was built through the power of God. This Philippian church ended well. It ended on a high note here as far as the information in the Scriptures because, when we look at the end of Philippians 4, here's what we read about them. We read verse 14; "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone..." The Philippian church would share with Paul in his affliction by being a faithful service, fruitful service, to Paul in Thessalonica. We read this - Philippians 4:16; "...for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."

Guess where they go next in Acts chapter 17? The next city they go to after they leave Philippi is Thessalonica, and we'll read about that. So, the Philippians were so faithful to Paul, so caring about this ministry, they sent a gift to him, not just once while he was in Thessalonica, and they didn't stop there. They also did this when Paul was in Corinth. We learn this from 2 Corinthians 11:8-9. This Philippian church was faithful in their ministry, and it is an example to us, not just concern about themselves and having their own difficulties which they clearly had, but they were concerned for the ministry that was going forward beyond them. Finally, in Philippians 4:18, Paul, writing in prison in Rome, writes this to the Philippians, "But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

This ministry of the Philippian church was abundantly fruitful and continued on and is a great testimony to the ability of God to work through young believers, young churches. People that are not even that well-grounded can develop and have a very fruitful ministry. What a testimony to us - that we should be not just looking out for our own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. In fact, that's what Paul says to these very Philippians, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Do nothing in that attitude. May we be faithful to serve the interests of others as if they were more important than ourselves. That's the message to the Philippians, and they followed that, and so should we.