

Title: So What if I Commit My Life to Really Obeying God?

Text: Acts 16:11-40

Date: January 13, 2019

God willing, next week, I'm going to begin a series of messages in the Book of Philippians. Philippians is a wonderful little epistle that Paul wrote expressing his great joy and love for the people of Philippi, ironically, even as Paul was in prison for his faith in Christ.

We might say this about Philippians – a book that beautifully intermingles joy and sorrow.

- Many days, serving God is a pleasure.
- Some days, serving God can be painful.
- But every day, serving God is worth it!

Today, before we jump into studying Philippians, we're going to look at the backdrop of what was going on in the city of Philippi prior to Paul writing the letter. The backstory of Philippians is contained in Acts 16 and it all occurred on Paul's second missionary journey with Paul. Notice the story of Acts 16 will contain the pleasure of following Christ...the pain of following Christ...but also the supreme value and worth of following Christ!

INTRO. Ever noticed how casually we sing songs without pausing to reflect on the words? Maybe we like the song's beat, rhyme, rhythm, or memory – and we sing on without actually thinking about what we are singing.

I vividly recall a song we sang in church when I was a kid that illustrates what I'm talking about. It's an old hymn called, "Send the Light" by Charles Gabriel. There's no telling how many times I sang, "Send the Light" during Sunday services as a child. In stanza two, we sang these words:

*We have heard the Macedonian call today, "Send the light! Send the light!"
And a golden offering at the cross we lay, "Send the light! Send the light!"*

*Send the light, the blessed Gospel light; let it shine, from shore to shore!
Send the light, the blessed Gospel light; let it shine, forever more!*

Imagine this. I'm a 9-year-old kid singing about some Macedonian call and a golden offering...to say the least I wasn't sure what I was singing.

Context. But this statement → *we have heard the Macedonian call today* → actually stems from the story in Acts 16.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were on Paul's second missionary journey. Paul had been mentoring Timothy at Lystra. Paul wanted to go on from the regions of Syria and Galatia into Asia – but doors kept closing for him to do this. In fact, he was "forbidden by the Spirit" to go into Asia and preach the Word (Acts 16:6).

So one night while sleeping in Troas, Paul gets a vision (dream) that he was to head north to Macedonia in response to a man who was pleading for the missionary team's help. "Come and preach to us...come and help us in Macedonia" was what Paul sensed was being said to him in the dream. So that's exactly what Paul did.

Paul went into Macedonia (and its premiere city Philippi) to "send the light, the blessed Gospel" light. What Gospel? This is basically what Paul preached everywhere he went:

- Someone died for our sins.
- Someone was raised from the dead.
 - His name is Jesus Christ.
- You must repent and believe in Him and be saved!

LESSON. Macedonia (Philippi) was NOT the place Paul originally planned to be, but it was the place God chose to use Paul.

Anytime you plan "A" – but God chooses "B" – hear me when I say this → go with God!

Look with me at Acts 16:11-12. Paul, Silas, and Timothy:

- Go from the port of Neapolis eight miles up to Philippi.
- Philippi is a leading city of the district of Macedonia.
 - It's a Roman colony.

Three Stories Occur in Philippi, Macedonia:

First, there is Lydia's conversion to Christ (16:13-15).

Paul's team is settling in Philippi. There is no place for them to worship since there are no synagogues or churches in Philippi at this time. But they are accustomed to worshipping on the Sabbath. So they go outside of Philippi's city gates near a river where they hope to find a place to pray and worship.

While praying, they engage some women nearby in conversation about the Lord. As the conversation unfolds, one of the women – Lydia, a wealthy seller of purple from Thyatira – inquires more about Christ. God opens Lydia's heart to receive Paul's message about Christ.

- Lydia get saved and baptized.
- Lydia's family gets saved and baptized.
- Paul's team stays at Lydia's house and is served by them.

Note, Paul only sought two things in this scene:

- He sought to pray (v 13).
- He sought to share Christ (v 14).

What a wonderful lesson for all of us! If only I gave myself to these two top priorities here!

- 1) O God, I want to desperately seek you in prayer!
 - 2) O God, I want to be unashamed to bring you up in conversation.
- (I think these two are interconnected: prayer/evangelism...evangelism/prayer)

Note, Christians, let us be faithful in prayer and witnessing!

- As we seek to be faithful to honor the Lord – God will put opportunities/people before us to minister to.
- Christians, let us seek God in prayer...because many around us are seeking the truth.
 - As I seek God...God will fill me *something to say* to the seekers around me.
 - May God help me nudge/push people across the finish line into the arms of Christ!
(*ILLUS: Jon Hodorff through me over the wall in a Spartan race to finish!*)

Second, Paul's exorcism of slave girl, followed by his imprisonment (16:16-24).

16:16, once again, Paul is on his way to prayer. He encounters a slave girl who is possessed by a wicked spirit. The wicked spirit enables her to be a fortune-teller, or soothsayer. Her owners make lots of money because of her magical abilities.

The possessed girl was following behind Paul's ministry team and constantly antagonizing them.

- They are preaching to you a message of salvation!
 - They are servants of the Most High God!

But she was undoubtedly not doing so from a spirit of support and truth. This greatly annoyed Paul (v 18). Paul turned and cast the demon out of the girl.

The slave girl's owners become very angry because their ability to make money has vanished.

- Notice, they don't care about the girl, they just care about the money.

The slave girl's owners have Paul/Silas captured and taken to the town square, where they are accused of proselytizing. Things turn into a mob. The chief magistrates allowed Paul/Silas to be severely beaten because of their bold witness for Christ. They are arrested and thrown in jail, where they are made triple-secure.

- They have a jailer watching them.
- They are placed in an inner-cell with no windows.
 - Their feet are bound in stocks.

Lesson: we must always remember, when people are getting saved, getting set-free, and getting healthy, the devil hates it – and the devil will try to stop us.

- Lydia has gotten saved.
- The slave girl was set free.

This is how you know a city/land needs revival.

- The leaders don't care about truth (they resist the gospel).
 - Paul's gospel was peace, yet he was beaten for it.
 - "Don't tell us we need to repent..."
- Men care more about money than they care about people in pain.
 - The poor girl was possessed, but they only saw their profit vanish.

Third, notice Paul's miracle at midnight and release from jail (16:25-35).

This section of the story is staggering! Notice Paul and Silas's behavior in jail, after being beaten and flogged during the day → praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening (v 25). What a testimony! Singing and praying, while incarcerated!

Meanwhile, a violent earthquake takes place. It shakes the foundations of the jail. All the doors are opened! All the stocks are loosed!

The jailer wakes up and assumes the prisoners have all run away. So he grabs a sword to kill himself, but Paul shouts, "Don't harm yourself. We are all still here!"

The jailer turns on the lanterns to confirm none of the prisoners have run away, though their cells are open. The jailer rushes over to Paul and Silas. He knows something unusual/miraculous is taking place.

The jailer asks, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" Or, "How can I possibly know your God, a God capable of doing this?"

- The jailer then leads Paul and Silas out of their cells.

Paul says, "Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved. God will save you and your entire family if you will call on his name." What an amazing scene!

- Paul shares the Gospel.
- All are saved and baptized.
- The jailer cleans Paul's wounds.
- The jailer serves Paul a meal.
 - All in one night!

Lesson. O the things God can do in just one night!

- God can get you out of a jam!
- God can change somebody's heart as you pray and worship.
- God can save a whole family!

Lesson. Paul would rather be obedient in jail, than be silent about Christ outside of jail.

Lesson. What a testimony this is to the other prisoners. What draws attention to Christ isn't your faith when things are good, but when things are bad!

- Prov 16:7, *When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies be at peace.*

Q: So Pastor Jeremy, what is happening in Acts 16?

A: Paul obeyed God and traveled to Macedonia where Paul saw God do many supernatural works.

Big Idea. When I commit to obey God, no matter the cost, God fills my life with his presence and power and does things that only God can do.

O God help me to obey you! May I obey you and seek you in 2019 like never before!

This passage helps me see what obedience is supposed to look like –

Obedience means surrender, flexibility, and cooperation.

- Rearranged plans (I wanted Asia, but God said Macedonia).
- It's amazing how many of us are hell-bent on chasing the things God forbids...while being scared to death of the things God asks us to pursue.
(In 2019...I want to pursue His presence!)

Obedience means prayer!

- Three scenes in Acts, and all three begin with prayer (v 13) (v 16) (v 25).

Obedience may mean suffering!

- Paul served God...but Paul was beaten!

The devil is okay with making me temporarily happy, if he knows he can make me eternally miserable.

Christianity is about being temporarily uncomfortable, because we know one day we will be eternally happy.

Obedience is also about having a good attitude even as we suffer!

- Singing and praying in prison. Wow!

Application. This text (Acts 16) makes us answer five questions about ourselves –

First, am I serving where God wants me to serve?

- Paul wanted Asia, but he got Macedonia.
- This is how we discern God's will: prayer...counsel/friends...and faith.

When's the last time you asked God these questions –

God am I where you want me to be? God, have I missed you? Please don't let me miss you!

Second, do I open my mouth with both conviction and compassion to share the Gospel?

- Conviction: Paul witnessed to Lydia.
- Compassion: Paul saw a girl's pain and spoke to the wicked spirit!

Question – how often do I share the Gospel? How often do I speak up for Jesus?

- Am I bold?
- Am I kind?

Third, am I willing to absorb affliction and pain even as I serve the Lord?

- Notice Paul's beating, flogging, and jail time – wow!

Question – when’s the last time your obedience cost you something? When did it make you pay a price? No one would seek pain. But my point is this – how much of my life has been spent avoiding pain and running from it to be safe, or less than courageous about Christ?

Job 13:15, “*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.*”

Phil 3:10, “*That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings...*”

Fourth, will I have a good attitude – an attitude of prayer and worship – even if obeying God’s voice requires me to be in an undesirable place?

- When you sing/pray in your storm – THAT is your testimony!
 - Think of where praying/worshiping can take me!
 - Think of where I should take praying/worshiping in my life!

One of the reasons I sing in church is in honor of the many Christians, soldiers, and missionaries in third world countries or persecuted lands who cannot sing!

Fifth, do I believe God can do whatever He wants, as quickly as He wants, to get the attention of the people around me?

- In just one night...God did so much!
 - Do I believe He can still do it?
- Will I keep praying and singing like God might do it tonight?

CONCL. This year, why not make 2019 a year of total obedience to God? I’m not telling you it will be easy...but I’m telling you it will be worth it!