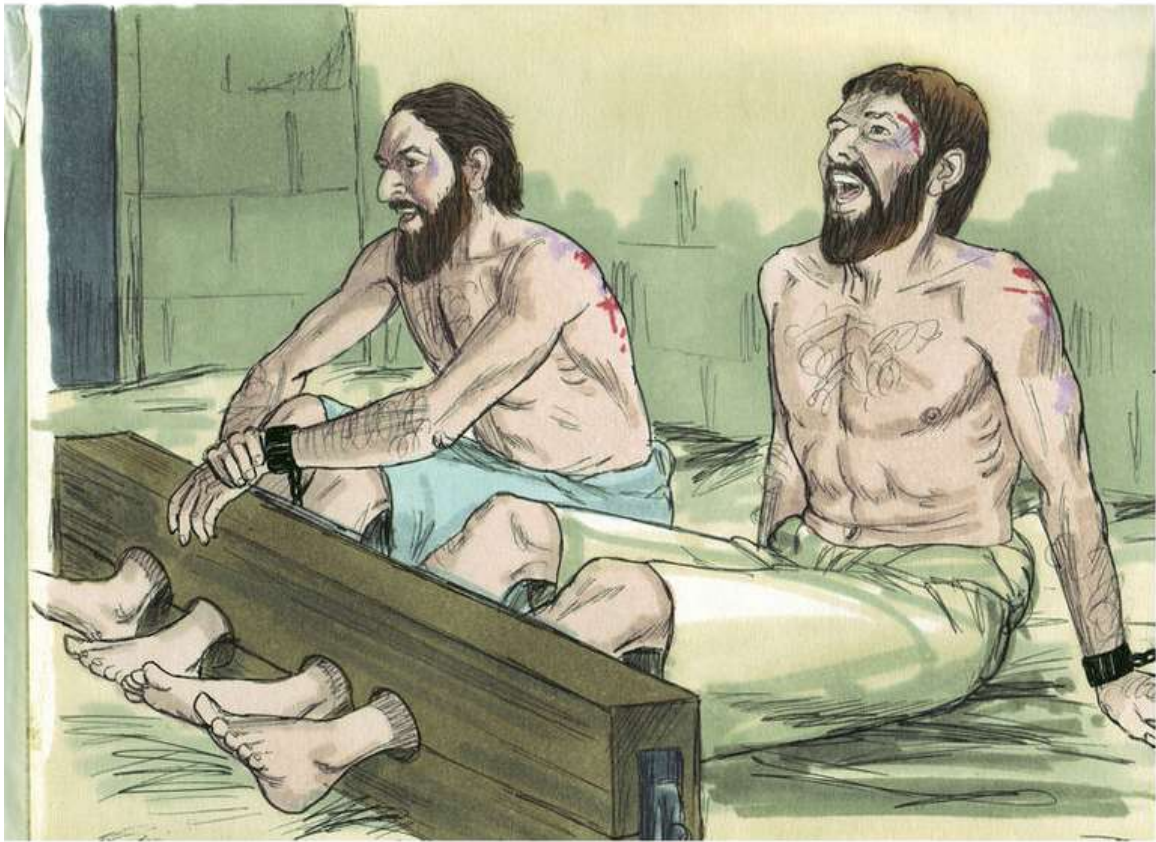


Acts 16 – Into Europe and into jail!



Paul set off on a second missionary journey into what is now the land of Turkey, together with his new companion, Silas. Somehow the Holy Spirit compelled them to keep on travelling, and they ended up in the port of Troas. That night Paul had a vision of a man begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” Paul and Silas took this as a clear sign that God had called them to preach the Good News to the people there, and they set sail across the Aegean Sea for what was to be the beginning of the Church’s mission to Europe.

Verse 10 is significant in that the writer, Luke, stops speaking of Paul and his companions as “they”, and begins to use the word “we”. It appears that at some point in the journey Paul had met Luke, who was a Gentile Christian and possibly one of his earlier converts, and that Luke had joined him and Silas on their travels. From now on, therefore, the Acts of the Apostles will be an eye-witness account written by a man who participated in the events described.

Things went smoothly to begin with, as Paul and his friends were welcomed by some of the Jews living in Philippi and invited to stay at the home of a wealthy woman named Lydia, whom they baptized, along with her household. The situation changed, however, when Paul delivered a slave-girl from the oppression of what was believed to be a spirit with the power to predict the future. When her owners realized that their source of income had gone, they had Paul and Silas arrested, accusing them of teaching against the customs of the Roman

Empire. The two men were whipped and thrown into jail, but not even that could stop them praising God (verse 25). That night an earthquake threw open the doors of the prison and the chains fell off the inmates.

In contrast with the incident in Acts 12 in which Peter's chains fell off, Paul and Silas were not prompted to make their escape, to the great relief of the jailer who thought he had lost his charges and was about to commit suicide. This led to the jailer also becoming a believer, and he and his family were baptized at once. Next day, Paul and Silas revealed that they were Roman citizens, and the city authorities who had had them publically whipped were obliged to make an abject apology to them for the mistreatment they had received.

There is enough material in this exciting chapter for many sermons! What stands out for me is the obedience shown by Paul and Silas to the Holy Spirit, and their readiness to go where the Spirit led them, and do what the Spirit told them, whatever the consequences might be. Because of this, there was power in their words and actions, and people came to believe. In verse 7, the Holy Spirit is described as "the Spirit of Jesus", a reminder that, although Jesus was no longer physically present with His followers, He was still alive and active in them, by the power of His Spirit. His saving work was continuing through His Body on earth, the Church. It still is, today.

A prayer:

*Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me;
All His wonderful passion and purity.
O thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.*

(Albert W. T. Orsborn, 1886 – 1967)

- Rev John Barnett

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