

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 21 May 2023
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: Saved by grace (Acts 10-28)
Passage: Acts 16
Title: Imprisoned but free!
Outline:

1. Flexibility (1-5)
2. Guidance (6-15)
3. Opposition (16-24)
4. Joy (25-40)

- Two questions I have for you as I begin this morning...
- Are you convinced that salvation **IS** entirely by God's grace (the title of this series)?
- And second, do you have **CONFIDENCE** in the gospel of grace in today's world... that when it *is shared* here and now – in central and western NSW – it is still **effective**... and will continue to **draw** people to **God**??//
- On this Sunday after the ascension I want to remind you of **two important things** associated with Jesus' ascension
 - one – of the **great commission** Lord Jesus **gave** his disciples before he **left** his disciples – *go into all the world and make **disciples**...* - Matthew 28
- And then from the beginning of this book of Acts – his direction in ch 1 – just before he ascended – *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth**...*
- So: a **command** – **GO and make disciples**
- And a **promise** – *you **WILL BE** my witnesses...*
- And right through the account in this book of the Acts of the Apostles – that is **exactly** what we've seen happen...
- Disciples **have been made**... see v5 here in Ch 16 - and the **apostles** have **witnessed** to the **resurrection**.
- We can't witness directly to Jesus' resurrection – we are around 2,000 too late – but we can witness to the impact of the risen Lord in our lives... and we can certainly be about the work of making disciples – of sharing Jesus for life!!
- And I think we see here in Ch 16, some principles we can have in mind as we go about that work... So I want you to see:
 1. The **FLEXIBILITY** of Paul's approach
 2. The **GUIDANCE** he received
 3. The **OPPOSITION** he faced once again
 4. And finally the **JOY** of the gospel
- First

1. FLEXIBILITY

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- You'll recall last week that Peter, then Paul and Barnabas, argued that the new Gentile Christians should not be expected to be **circumcised** nor follow the **OT law**.
- This was all **agreed** to and they sent Paul and Barnabas back to **Antioch** where this dispute had arisen, with a **letter** setting it all out.
- But here now at the beginning of Ch 16 - something really **astonishing** takes place.... Having argued that Gentiles should be required to be circumcised... Paul circumcises a young man named Timothy.
- What is that about??? Are you **kidding** Paul??
- Timothy's mother was a **Jew** – father a **Greek**... he's **highly spoken** of by **everyone**...
- but have a look with me at v3 – *Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*
- We see here the **flexibility** in his approach...
- Once it is clear that Timothy was not **saved** through circumcision nor was circumcision **required** for him to be in relationship with Jesus... than he was **free** to **circumcise** him for the sake of getting alongside those he was trying to **reach** for the **gospel!**
- He was **practising** – **demonstrating** what he would go on to **write** about in 1 Corinthians 9:19ff – *though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law..., so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law... so as to win those not having the law... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I may save some. /*
- I well remember when my sister and brother-in-law – both having been baptised as babies, joined a **Baptist** church.
- At that time they could not become official **members** of that church, unless **baptised by immersion**.
- So even though they didn't see it as in any way **necessary**, they **did** so, so as to be able to work in the **cause** of the **gospel** at **that church!**
- You may have noticed that sometimes I wear a purple bishop's collar and robe for church – and sometimes I don't.... because I'm working hard at getting alongside people in different contexts.... Sometimes all the robes etc will be completely appropriate... at other times – they will not...
- all things to all people – that I may save some... **Flexibility** in **approach**...
- Here's the **question**... is our passion for the gospel such that **WE** are prepared to be **flexible** in our approach – even going against what might be **cultural norms for us** – in an effort to get **alongside people**... *so that by all possible means we might save some!*

2. GUIDANCE

- I want you to note the way Paul is guided here...
- Have a look with me at v6 *Paul and his companions travelled 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 Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul has a vision of 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.*

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- I don't know **how** the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching the word in the province of Asia... or **how** the Spirit of Jesus... prevented them from entering Bithynia.
- May have been **illness, opposition, an inner conviction**... but no matter how it happened, Luke interprets it as the **clear guidance of the Holy Spirit**.
- Doors were **closed**.
- And they were obviously closed for a reason even though they wouldn't have seen it at the time.
- Those doors were closed, so that they might be free to enter **another** door that clearly **opened in Macedonia**.
- I think that is how the Lord **often** guides.
- The Lord **opens** and **closes** doors to **reveal** his **plans** and so that his will might **unfold**.
- That's how I've always prayed about things.... When I first applied to go into ministry – Lord if this isn't **your** plan – please **close** the **doors**.
- When I was asked whether I'd agree to be considered to come to **Bathurst Diocese** – my prayer was "if this is what **you** want – please **open** the **doors**..."
- And he **did**.
- Doors will **open** and **close** for all sorts of reasons – but it is the **Holy Spirit** controlling the **doors**...!
- And we **continue** to **pray** – Lord – if this is of **you** – please **open** the doors... if it's not – please **close** the **doors**!
- And although I don't think we see this a lot today – there **may** be times – such as Paul experienced here – that the Lord gives a **vision**... through a dream or something...
- In Paul's case here – the call to **Macedonia** opened up a **whole new mission field for Paul** – as you'll see on this map...
- Flexibility, guidance,

3. OPPOSITION

- Now what we see here from vv16ff, is that **opposition** will come for a number of differing reasons.
- The first incident of opposition was about **money**.
- the owners of a slave girl suddenly lost a **lucrative income stream**... she earned a great deal of money for her owners through fortune telling (v16)
- So when Paul - in the **name** of Jesus – i.e., by the **power** of Jesus - **released** her from the spirit that was troubling her, the **owners** (v19) realised that their hope of making money was **gone**... and that is what led to Paul and Silas being dragged into the marketplace to face the **authorities**...
- Their **claimed that Paul and Silas were advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice** (v21)... but the **underlying** issue was **economics**...
- A good reminder that opposition **today** will come for a number of reasons...
- Some of it – **economic**
- Some of it – **jealousy**
- Some of it – **ecclesiastical** – i.e. – because one tradition of the church doesn't like how **well** another is doing and feel **threatened** by it...

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- Some of it is **political**...
- Some of it is to do with the rise and influence of **secular humanism**
- And some of it will simply because people don't want anyone else to **rule** their lives but them... so they'll raise opposition around the Bible being made up or the church being full of hypocrites or having too much money etc....
- But please note that the **stated** reason for opposition may not in fact be the **actual** reason for the opposition... and sometimes it's good to take the time to listen and understand the reason **behind** the **reason!! //**
- I also want you to notice that in the face of opposition, Paul and Silas stood up for their **rights** as Roman citizens... did you notice that?? That they protest their **flogging** and their **harsh treatment** in imprisonment and refuse to go quietly until there is an acknowledgement that the way they were treated was **unacceptable**.
- In the same way today – we must ensure we stand for **our** rights as **Australian** citizens – especially that of **free speech** - to be able to express our views –without being sanctioned merely for speaking our **mind** or saying what the Bible says! **///**
- Flexibility, guidance, opposition and finally

4. JOY

- I want us to see the great **joy** of believing.
- First in **Paul and Silas**... what were they doing in the middle of the night in **prison**? They were **praying** and singing **hymns** to **God**!
-so much so that all the other prisoners were **listening** to them...
- they're joyfully praising God because even though they are in **prison**, they are actually wonderfully and gloriously **free**!
- Paul and Silas know what it's like to **trust** God... Paul will write later that he's learnt the secret of **contentment** whatever the circumstance... *Philippians 4 – I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*
- But there's also the wonderful joy of new belief here...
- So there's this awesome earthquake... Paul and Silas stay put, but the jailer fears the worst and is about to take his life
- When Paul shouts – “it's ok we're all here” – the fact that they stay must have had a huge impact on him... and he wants whatever it is they have, asking ‘what must I do to be saved?’
- **Profound question – simple answer – believe in the Lord Jesus – entrust yourself to Jesus – you will be saved – you and your household...**
- That's it – **trust – believe**.
- They *spoke the word of the Lord to them* – by which I take it that he explained the good news of Jesus and what he had done by his death and resurrection... he **washed** Paul and Silas' **wounds** – and the in **baptism** – Paul **washes** the **jailer** and family from **sin**... it's a **beautiful scene**... **//**
- ...and then note v34b – *he (the jailer) was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – his and his whole family!*

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- Friends – that’s what the gospel - when it’s **understood** and **embraced does...** it causes people to **respond** with **joy...**
- I’m never quite sure why some of the most **miserable** people I know – grumpy – hard to get on with - are **church** people! - and sometimes I think – they surely don’t **know** that Jesus **died** and **rose again** and that they are saved **entirely** by God’s grace... that’s a thing of **joy!!**
- Friends – capture **again** the **joy** of the **gospel**
- The joy of being **forgiven**
- The joy of being **reconciled** to God through Jesus
- The joy of **eternal life**
- Friends - discover **again** // the **joy** of the **jailer** – who was filled with **joy** because he had come to believe in **God!!** ///
- Let me sum up:
- ...we’ve seen Paul’s **flexibility** – all things to all people that he might save some... may the same **passion** to see people saved... cause **us** to be **flexible** in our **approach** //
- We’ve seen the way Paul was **guided**... may we too be open to God **opening** and **closing doors** of **opportunity** and **ministry**... and **walk** through those **open** for us
- We’ve seen that **opposition** can have all sorts of motivation and the need to take the time to **understand where it’s coming from...**
- And we’ve seen the **joy** of coming to **believe** in the **Lord Jesus and being saved**... may that joy be yours in a fresh way today!