

# Disruptive Disciples

Acts: More than a Movement, Part 2

Acts 15:36-16:40

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For several weeks now we've been looking at a movement that is turning the world upside down, and it's what we find in our passage today. A movement not by the power of man, or the fads of our age, but a movement instituted and empowered by the maker of heaven and earth.

In chapter 13 we witnessed the overarching plan of God to rescue his people. In chapter 14 we discussed how this movement of the gospel is unstoppable. And last week we heard about the first Christian theology conference. How this movement is unified around the foundational message that salvation comes through the grace of the Lord Jesus, and nothing needs be added for salvation.

Movements like this are disruptive, like an earthquake beneath your feet. They turn the world upside down. Who here felt the earthquake we had Friday afternoon? Now imagine a real earthquake?

In 2017 there was a 7.1 magnitude earthquake in Mexico City. One survivor recounts being thrown back and forth as though the ground were made of liquid. This seismic shift sent their whole city into gridlock and chaos. Disrupting life as they knew it.

Throughout Acts 16, and into chapter 17 Luke paints a picture of the world being shaken up by the gospel message of Jesus the Christ. This movement disrupts comfortability and structures that make us content.

Today we are given three stories of disruption that lead to salvation in Philippi. Many other things happened in Philippi, but Luke writes these three stories of life change, showing us how the gospel disrupts a city and transforms the lives of a woman, a slave, and a Gentile jailor. We will witness this disruption through a word, a work, and a wonder.

But first the text in Acts 15:36-16:10 recounts how we get to Philippi. Luke doesn't focus a ton of attention here, so we won't either. I simply want to draw out one main observation that continues on into our three stories of life change.

The overwhelming emphasis here is that God is the director and main actor of this movement. Look at chapter 16, verses 6-10. Now, whose eyes glaze over when they read all those locations? Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Mysia...I get it. I barely know the difference between Hays and Haysville, Kansas. So let me help you out. Here is [a map](#) of Paul's world. He starts in Antioch. This was the beginning of his first missionary journey, and the beginning of what we call his second missionary journey, which is our passage today.

While he's going this direction he thinks, "I should go to Asia." He probably wants to go to Ephesus; it's the center of all trade. But the Holy Spirit says, "Forbidden." So he goes up to Mysia and thinks, "I should go north to Bithynia." But the Spirit of Jesus says, "Do not enter. Not allowed."

So there are not a lot of places left. Can't go south. Can't go north. So like an American in the nineteenth century, Paul hears, go west, young man, go west. While in Troas, Paul receives a vision to go to Macedonia, and then as a group they determine that God is calling them to Macedonia.

How exactly did God lead? Luke purposely doesn't tell us anything other than the dream, because the main point for him is not how God leads but the fact that God is leading this movement. It's not dependent on Peter or Paul, but on God and God alone.

And the same thing is true today, because we can be sure both then and now God is leading each and every one of us into places that continue his movement.

I know we still have questions about how the Spirit leads. We talked a little about it last week. How the Spirit leads through historical events, Scripture, and inner assurance. From this week we might add visions, which in Acts come specifically at times of gospel expansion to new territories. Then also, communal discernment, as it's clear from verse 10 that this is not solely Paul's decision, but the group concludes where God is leading. This is also the first place where our author, Luke, inserts himself into the narrative. You'll notice the pronouns change to "we."

When it comes to the Spirit's leading, there's no one size fits all. Not everything in Acts happens today. Rather the Spirit's leading is dynamic, scriptural, and communal. And oftentimes, we see it best only in retrospect. The main point is that God is leading this movement of the gospel.

God leads these first followers to Philippi, where we find three stories of disruption that lead to salvation. Three stories: a word, a work, and a wonder.

We'll look at these three stories and then reflect on three quick implications at the end.

Look with me at Acts 16:11-15 where we find a word spoken.

## A WORD

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### Acts 16:11-15<sup>1</sup>

*<sup>11</sup>So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup>and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. <sup>13</sup>And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. <sup>14</sup>One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup>And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*

Now, what you've got to know about Philippi is that it is a Roman colony. So it's sort of a big deal. Highest honor you can receive. It's like an embassy. The whole town is considered Italian soil in the midst of Greece. So, unlike the surrounding cities, Philippi didn't pay taxes, and they would have been fully governed by Roman law and practices. They worshiped Caesar and Roman law. These people were tried and true Romans, and loved their city. They loved their city more than any of you love your Shockers.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

And in this city we are introduced to the first convert of Western Europe. It's like when you open a business for the first time, or in a new location, and you make that first dollar bill. What happens? It gets framed and put up in your office. Lydia is their framed first convert.

Here's how it happens...when the Sabbath day rolls around Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke go out looking for a synagogue as they always do, but the Jewish community must be small because there isn't an official synagogue. So instead of a synagogue, they come across something even better: a woman's bible study, like Tuesday Connection.

There are only women here, and Luke tells us one who heard them is named Lydia. We're given four details about Lydia.

First, her name is Lydia. Profound. I know. But you'll see she is the only character from Philippi named, which is significant. It most likely indicates that she is a woman of some influence and means. Worthy of being named.

Second, she's from the city of Thyatira. So she's traveled, and probably moved to Philippi for business.

Third, Lydia is a seller of purple goods. So she's undoubtedly wealthy. Purple was one of the hardest dyes to extract, and consequently was very expensive. At this time there was even a sort of monopoly on purple goods, and many of the sellers were associated with Caesar's household. So, Lydia is a wealthy businesswoman who runs a company selling high end goods, and has significant influence. Essentially, she's made it. Professionally.

Lastly, we learn that she is a worshiper of God. This is sort of a technical way of saying she worshiped the Jewish God, but didn't become a Jew. She was a good, religious person. Tried to live a moral life. Probably, more socially conservative than the surrounding Roman world. She attended worship service regularly. People would have liked her and thought well of her. Lydia then, is a sophisticated woman of means who is seeking God.

Everything was perfect, but something was missing.

Luke tells us that the Lord opened her heart to a word from Paul. What did Paul say? It's not recorded, but it was probably something similar to what he said in chapter 13. Here is the crux of what he said there: "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man (Jesus) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (vv. 38-39).

Paul spoke a word of salvation, the Lord opened her heart, Lydia listened and believed. And she was never the same.

We see here that this gospel disrupts the religious.

Lydia was a good, God-worshiping person. She was spiritual, but that doesn't bring salvation. It doesn't bring freedom. The good news of a king who's come to save disrupts her religious practice and reveals to her the longing of her heart.

And look, Lydia doesn't say, "Really interesting Paul, good teaching, let me add that so I can be better." No, what Lydia does is get baptized. Which, if you think about it, baptism is a symbol that I need to die to myself. My striving. My gain. My effort. My self-centeredness. And I need to turn the whole orientation of my life toward God and his son Jesus. I need to give my whole allegiance to this king who saves.

Maybe you can see how disruptive this might be for a good, religious, self-made businesswoman. Maybe you can relate? It's not about being good, it's about new life. And it's what Lydia receives.

Lydia's conversion ends with her housing and caring for Paul and his companions during their entire time in Philippi, which leads us into the next story of life change, a slave girl.

## A WORK

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### Acts 16:16-24

*<sup>16</sup>As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup>She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." <sup>18</sup>And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.*

*<sup>19</sup>But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. <sup>20</sup>And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. <sup>21</sup>They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." <sup>22</sup>The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup>And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup>Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

Contrary to Lydia, we meet a girl who is unnamed, young, poor, has no status, and is doubly a slave (to both a spirit and owners).

If Lydia was at the top of society this girl was in the gutters. A victim of human trafficking, this slave girl was exploited and oppressed for economic gain. We're told she has the spirit of divination and makes her owners a good profit. Literally it says she has the spirit of the python. This goes back to the famous Greek city of Delphi, and the oracle of the god Apollo. It was believed that the spirit of Apollo was embodied in a great python and would inspire "pythonesses" to tell the future. These pythian oracles were famous for telling your future... as long as the price was right.

We're told this slave girl meets our company of travelers and for some reason she relentlessly, day after day, shadows Paul saying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." Sounds great. Free publicity.

Can you imagine this manic girl, at their heels each day, announcing their arrival wherever they go? And don't miss the irony. This girl, who's doubly a *slave*, announcing men who bring *salvation*.

So Paul does a work. Filled with compassion he releases her from her bondage... Right? No. Rather, "greatly annoyed" the scripture says, he commands the Spirit to come out. Paul was annoyed, and he had good reason to be. Of course she was a little much, but you see, in Philippi the term "Most High God" would have been extremely misleading. We know there are few Jews there, and Greek

and Roman hearers would not have thought of Yahweh, the God of the Jews. This phrase could easily mean any number of their own gods.

For Paul this is annoying because it's confusing the true message of salvation. So when Paul heals this girl it's not in the name of the Most High, but the name of Jesus the Messiah. The slave girl encounters the liberating power of Jesus' name, and the one who announced salvation is saved from her oppressors. Making it clear who is truly the "Most High God."

Now we aren't told that she comes to faith, but she is liberated from the oppressive powers. Not just spiritually oppressive powers, but economic and socially oppressive powers. Look, she couldn't be liberated spiritually without also being liberated socially and economically.

In a nice play on words, Luke reveals this in verse 18 and 19. He says as the spirit "left her" the owners' hope of economic profit "left them." The owners don't care about the Most High God. They care about one thing: profit.

They care about economic benefit found in their oppression and their pagan way of life. But the gospel disrupts the pagan way of life.

The structures of the world that create oppression and exploitation. The gospel disrupts each and every one of them. This work of releasing an oppressed slave girl represented a tear in the basic fabric of their pagan way of life. This is what the work of the gospel does when it is lived out. And it's just as true today as it was then.

As many of you know we are in the month of Ramadan, one of the five pillars of Islam. One of our missions partners, recently contributed to a unique daily video to help people pray for Muslims during the month of Ramadan.

Well, this week was the story of Nadia, a woman in a Muslim country. She says that being a woman in a Muslim country is an experience of great oppression. She says it was only when she met Jesus and followed him that she discovered true freedom for the first time in her life. Spiritually yes, but also economically, educationally, and physically.

The slave owners saw that this gospel would disrupt their livelihood, so they drag Paul and Silas (not sure what happened to Luke and Timothy at this point) before the rulers and crowds saying these men are disturbing our city.

And they're right. These Jesus people disrupt a pagan way of life. Would the accusations be true for your life? Look, people are generally fine for you to believe in whatever God you want, but once that belief starts to impact economic gain and ways of life, that's when conflict happens. Because, the gospel disrupts a pagan way of life. A way of life that places profit before people. A way of life that exploits and oppresses in order to gain power.

The name of Jesus is the power to disrupt them all.

We all live and move within a pagan world that worships at the feet of wealth. And Jesus doesn't call us to all become paupers. I mean we just learned about Lydia, a wealthy woman of status who comes to faith. Rather, this disruption asks: Do you seek justice for the oppressed? Do you exploit for economic gain? Do you oppress your coworkers or your family members just so you can make

yourself seem powerful? Because if you follow a pagan way of life it's confusing who you really worship.

Gospel people disrupt all these pagan structures, seeking mercy, justice, and righteousness in their homes, community, and world.

So Paul and Silas are publicly beaten, thrown in prison, and our next character is introduced. A Gentile jailer. Instructed to guard them securely.

## A WONDER

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### Acts 16:25-34

*<sup>25</sup>About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup>and 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 bonds were unfastened. <sup>27</sup>When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup>But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." <sup>29</sup>And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup>Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup>And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup>And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup>And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. <sup>34</sup>Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.*

This jailer is a Gentile, and likely a retired soldier. Many retired soldiers were sent to this region and given government jobs. So he's not high class, but not low class either. He's like a shift worker just doing his job.

Different than the other two, he's not seeking God, he's not antagonistic to Paul and Silas. He's complacent, just doing his job. And he does his job really well. He doesn't have a lot of care for individuals. Paul and Silas are bloody and bruised. He doesn't care. He not only puts them in the inner prison, a stuffy and lightless place, but also puts their feet in stocks. These stocks would have been a wooden plank with notches for your feet to go in. Your legs would be splayed apart and immobilized.

Terribly uncomfortable, so it's no wonder Paul and Silas couldn't seem to sleep. Which makes their response to this situation incredibly unique. In the face of persecution, they respond with prayer and singing. Likely singing and praying the psalms. Not crying out with rage or groanings. All things the Gentile jailer is used to hearing. Instead their response is disruptive. This isn't how people are supposed to respond in prison.

Can you imagine this? How do you respond in your darkest moments? With prayers and singing? Or cynicism and cursing?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor theologian, knew a thing or two about prison. He spent his last couple years in prison before finally being executed at Flossenbürg. The last book Bonhoeffer published before going to prison was, *The Prayerbook of the Bible*, where he argues for the centrality of the Psalms, not only to the Scriptures but also to our own prayers. For it is the Psalms that focus us on God and his son, Jesus.

It was the prayers of the Psalms and Scripture that held Bonhoeffer fast while he was in prison. It was his hope in the Lord that led others in prison to faithfulness, changed guards' brutality, and it was this confidence that went with him to the gallows.

What would it take for us to respond like Paul, Silas, and Bonhoeffer? When times are tough, when your world seems to fall apart, when you feel trapped and alone. Do you have the sort of faith that sustains?

Paul and Silas and Bonhoeffer had the Psalms as their guide. They studied them. They memorized them. The Psalms taught them to lament, rejoice, be angry, and find contentment. It reminded them of a God who never leaves, who is always with his people.

And we need to learn to respond like Paul and Silas, because one thing we can be sure of: others are watching. Just like the prisoners who listened to them pray and sing all evening. Just like the jailer who is getting ready to have his world fall apart. Because, in the midst of their singing, a wonder happens. There's an earthquake opening the doors and unfastening everyone's bonds.

It was a wonder. Itself a picture of the gospel. This earthquake turns the world upside down and releases them from their captivity into freedom. The jailer wakes up to the noise, but for the Gentile jailer it's not a wonder, rather a catastrophe.

You have to know that Roman law dictates losing prisoners means your life is forfeit. He's a dead man. We've already seen this happen once in Acts 12. Imagine it. This complacent, indifferent jailer, just doing his job, has just had his whole world disrupted. Everything he trusted in is gone. He knows he's a dead man, so he decides to save himself the humiliation and take his own life.

Then, as sudden as an earthquake, Paul cries out "Don't harm yourself, we're all here!" The Gentile jailer's worry turns to wonder. Notice, it's not because of the earthquake. The earthquake happens and he wants to kill himself. No, the true wonder was that all the prisoners stayed in their cell, seemingly to spare his life. Sacrificing their freedom for his life.

Pastor Tim Keller says it like this, "Paul forfeited his right of freedom in order to save the jailer's life, because he knew the one who forfeited his right to save Paul's life."

The jailer runs in quaking with fear, and doesn't ask how this happened. He promptly asks, "What must I do to be saved?" Each event has escalated to this moment. Each disruption growing in seismic strength. What would it take to turn the heart of a Gentile, hardened from war? A jailer who's seen it all? A guard who is just doing his job, and wants to mind his own business? A guy who's fine the way things are?

What would it take to turn someone's allegiance from the Lord Caesar to the Lord Jesus?—The wonder of someone sacrificing their freedom for yours.

You see the gospel disrupts the complacent, the agnostic, the indifferent. Those who are doing just fine. But what happens when you're no longer fine. What happens when it seems like your life is crumbling around you? Do you have the sort of confidence and faith that Paul and Silas have? Do you have the sort of faith that can withstand the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, the unfair diagnosis?

The gospel disrupts our complacency, bidding us come and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who laid down his rights for our life. The one who didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbling himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming obedient to death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

The jailer responds in faith, and like Lydia, is baptized. Like Lydia he then brings the disciples to his home, also wrapping their wounds, and filling their bellies. All while the whole house rejoices because now they believe in God.

### THREE IMPLICATIONS

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So, as we come to a close I have just three quick implications. Three implications revealed in each story.

**First, it's God who has the power to change lives, and we're called to participate.** This theme is throughout. God leads them to Macedonia, and they follow. Lydia believes, God opens her heart, and Paul speaks. The slave is freed by the name of the Lord. Then the earthquake is an act of God, the prisoners stay, and the jailer comes to repentance.

When we look at the missionaries in Acts it's easy to make excuses for ourselves, like I can't do what they did, or to say, "ok we need to do exactly what they did."

Here we have three different stories. Three different works of God and man. And it's incredible. It's dynamic. We serve the same God today, and he calls us to participate in a myriad of ways. It's not something we do by our own power, but something we're called to participate in.

**Second, notice that receiving the gospel results in hospitality.** We've mentioned this throughout our study of Luke and Acts, but notice Lydia "prevailed" upon them to stay at her house. The jailer believes in the Lord Jesus, and then washes their wounds, brings them into his house and feeds them. But then we see the slave girl's owners, and the magistrates, reject the gospel and treat Paul and Silas inhospitably.

Responding to the gospel results in hospitality toward one another, especially those unlike yourself. To share a meal, welcome them into your house, or to be welcomed by someone else into their house. We are called to welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed us. This sort of hospitality is a necessary Christian practice and one of the most disruptive witnesses of all, because this sort of welcome creates the last implication.

**Lastly, this movement creates a family for all people.** As a church we are called to take the gospel to all peoples, and by it all people are incorporated into one family, and it's the most eclectic family.

Look where our text ends in verse 40. At Lydia's house. While it doesn't say it, most agree that the flow of text assumes all three individuals are there. The beginnings of a new church with the most unlikely people.

John Stott, in his commentary on the book of Acts, mentions a common morning prayer for Jewish men. It went something like this, “Thank you God that I am not made a woman, a slave, or a Gentile.” A woman, a slave, or a Gentile. Sound familiar?

Despised categories for a Jewish man, but treasured people in the movement of God. Paul reiterates these groups in Galatians 3:28. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This movement welcomes all people and creates a family for all people. No matter your gender, skin color, or economic status; we are one family united in Christ.

This is the type of movement that turned the world upside down. And if this gospel could do it then, it can do it now.

Creating a family united and held together by their common allegiance to their common Lord. This sort of movement would disrupt a city. A people who have a message of salvation. A people who seek mercy, justice, and righteousness. A people who follow their Lord in laying down their rights.

It’s happened before, and it can happen again.