

Learning from Act 16

By Santiago Lange

We live in a day when prejudice and discrimination is rampant. We engage in racial profiling. We measure each other by appearances, income levels, religion, experience, and political persuasions. We label people. Like it or not, we are often tempted to view some as more deserving of the gospel than others.



Jesus saw beyond categories. He didn't see race, gender, or social position. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not for the privileged or special groups, it is for everyone. In Acts 16 we see the gospel extended to a rich business woman, a troubled slave, and a despised jailer. Paul saw everyone as a person in need of God's grace. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is available to us, to our enemies and to our friends. We are not saved because of our background, we are saved by grace.

In the account of the slave woman in Acts 16 we see how ruthless people can become. Men took a demon possessed woman and, instead of trying to help, they exploited her. They made her into a "freak show". When Jesus set her free from her prison, the men didn't rejoice. On the contrary, they went after those through whom God acted to deliver her. The men resorted to bigotry and lies to "get even."

It's unfortunate that we live in a day when people will still sink to unimagined lows in order to indulge their lust for sin. We see television promoting the most hurtful and twisted kinds of relationships; blasphemy is broadcast over the airways; immorality is called entertainment; courts legalize sin and restrict faith; religious bodies have given up their position as the anchor for society and have instead chosen to become sailboats riding the winds of public opinion; religious celebrities distort truth to make a profit or to swell a crowd; and we dare to talk about the advance of civilization.

Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." (Jer. 17:9); Paul said, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12). These words strip away our defenses. The world may applaud us, but God sees the truth. God sees our sick and deluded heart needing healing.

Paul and Silas could have complained when they were imprisoned. Instead, they chose to praise and worship. The other prisoners listened (and the word means listened intently). They refused to let circumstances dictate their response to life. They trusted Christ. They believed that He was in control of all circumstances. They saw every event as an opportunity for God's glory to be manifested. It was this same Paul who wrote, "We know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love God and called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28).

It's relatively easy to "trust God" when things are going well. The question is, will we trust Him when we face headwinds?

- When we encounter a „difficult person“.
- When we are faced with a devastating diagnosis.
- When our dreams are shattered.
- When others lie about us.
- When things don't turn out as expected.
- When everyone deserts us.
- When we feel overwhelmed.

Many want to be "saved". They want to be saved from boredom, debt, addictions, disease, discomfort, and death. The gospel offers to save us from the greatest threat we could ever face. The gospel offers to save us from sin and its devastating consequences.

The way of salvation is clear. Paul explained it with succinctness:

"Believe (better understood as trust) on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." If we want to be saved from alienation from God and the destructiveness of sin we must turn to Jesus and place our confidence in the work that he alone accomplished for us on the cross. The gospel, as C. Baxter Kruger has so beautifully stated, is not the good news that we can receive Jesus in our life, but that Jesus has received us in his.

Walk in that reality! □