



16. 'Preaching the gospel'

Acts 16.¹³⁻⁴⁰

Background

The conclusion to which Paul and his companions had come, namely that *"God had called us to preach the gospel to them"* (v.10), is amplified in the rest of the chapter. We're given to see, through Luke's careful narrative, what 'preaching the gospel' involves, and the varied ways in which it will be given expression through the ministry of Christ's church.

The focus falls on three very different individuals, reflecting something of the variety of constituencies with which as the body of Christ we will be engaging. Think of the great spectrum of different people with whom Jesus readily engaged in the course of His earthly ministry and you'll see something of that repeated here at Philippi.

There are well-educated, well-to-do, and well-meaning individuals with a clear 'religious bent' such as Lydia: there are those whose lives are tormented by an enslavement from which they have no release, such as the slave girl: and there are hardened individuals, who've seen the grimier side of life, and who have learned to get by using their own wits and strength, such as the jailor. The gospel is needed by, and must be 'preached' to, all people.

What that preaching of the gospel looks like will (and must) vary, for all that there are certain common features: the content of the message remains the same obviously, but the manner in which the 'ministry of the word' is exercised differs greatly in each situation. Far from being a monochrome pattern, the church's ministry will invariably see the 'word' being ministered in just such a varied manner. Always a 'word' ministry, always the gospel message, always the Jesus-focus, and always the Spirit's doing: but, that said, certainly not a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to preaching the gospel!

In our contemporary society that is more necessary than ever! It's not hard to recognise parallels in our own society to each of the individuals whose conversions are narrated here: and one of the challenges we face is learning to adapt the way in which the word is ministered, without compromising the message, as we engage with different constituencies.

Try and at least read through the whole passage! **'Days' (1), (2) and (5)** are the ones to start with if you're short of time.

1) Monday 19th June – faith comes by hearing

Read [Acts 16.13-15](#)

“.. the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message ..” (Acts 16.14)

Paul’ intent was “to preach the gospel to them” (v.10). The rest of the chapter will show you what ‘preaching the gospel’ can involve: the effects of that preaching of the gospel can be sudden and surprising! Lesson #1 here – faith comes by hearing.

In what different ways was the gospel preached to you before you came to the point of faith?

Have there been people recently coming to faith in your fellowship? How did that come about in God’s sovereign providence?

If conversion requires the Lord to open a person’s heart (v.14) why is such stress laid on the appeal to the *mind* in our teaching of the Bible’s message?

The tense of the verb ‘listening’ suggests a continued activity in the part of Lydia: why is it that the Lord’s way of working is such that conversion is often a ‘gradual’ process?

Prayer: *May those who heard Your word yesterday at the ‘place of prayer’ have their hearts opened to the message, and make it known that they are now the Lord’s!*

2) Tuesday 20th June – a commanding presence

Read [Acts 16.16-18](#)

“.. In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her ..” (Acts 16.18)

Paul’s normal pattern was to ‘reason’ with people (see [Acts 17.2](#)), reliant always on the Lord to open the minds and then hearts of his hearers. But some aren’t open to reason! It’s still the gospel *word* – but communicated now very differently!

In what ways was the lady a slave? And what might be contemporary parallels to these slaveries?

Why did Paul become ‘so annoyed’ at the message which the female slave was constantly shouting?

Was this the exercise of a unique, ‘apostolic’ ministry – or are there situations and occasions when there’s a need for such ministry?

Read [Luke 10.17-20](#): does the authority with which Jesus sent out His disciples ([Matt.28.18-20](#)) mean that believers today have authority over the spirits?

Prayer: *Give me the wisdom, Lord, both to discern clearly what the issues are in the lives of those around me, and to know how best to preach the gospel to them.*

3) Wednesday 21st June – cities in uproar

Read [Acts 16.19-24](#)

".. these men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar .." (Acts 16.20)

The preaching of the gospel is transformative: but the changes and challenges it brings disturb the status quo – including significant economic interests. Those in power will often want to silence the preaching in order to safeguard their own self-interest.

In what ways have you experienced the hostility of individuals to the preaching of the gospel?

By what similarly specious arguments to those used by the owners here does our society in Scotland today seek subtly to marginalise the gospel?

Prayer: *Grant me a boldness, my gracious Lord, to proclaim Your truth, and a constancy of spirit to sustain me through the hostility I may encounter in so doing.*

4) Thursday 22nd June – a liberating gospel

Read [Acts 16.25-28](#)

".. all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose .." (Acts 16.26)

The Lord comes up with the best and most dramatic visual aids! What has God done for us in the gospel, if not opened the doors which confined us and loosed the shackles which bound us? Preaching the gospel reaches people others prefer to avoid!

The 'inner cell' was a wretched environment! What lessons can you learn for times of adversity from the way Paul and Silas conduct themselves in prison?

When things are hard for yourself how do you ensure that you remain mindful of the needs and circumstances of others?

Prayer: *When You work in mighty power, Lord, it's amazing! But when there are no such mighty deeds and my prayers aren't being answered, help me still to trust You.*

5) Friday 23rd June – more than all we ask or think

Read [Acts 16.29-34](#)

".. he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God .." (Acts 16.34)

The jailor's call for 'lights' was wonderfully answered – and in a way he'd never have imagined – by the Lord! The man's life was suddenly illumined as he saw his need, heard the truth, was gloriously saved, and was filled with joy! Light and life He brings!

In what ways is the narrative of what happened ([vv.25-34](#)) a graphic picture of the gospel message?

To what extent do people need to *experience* the gospel as well as having it *expounded* to them?

From the narrative of these verses what characterises a person who has been 'saved'?

Have there been times in your life when your adversity has been the context through which the Lord has worked powerfully in the lives of others?

Prayer: *Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory; blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire. Send forth Your word, and in our darkened land let there be light.*

6) Saturday 24th June – protecting God's people

Read [Acts 16.35-40](#)

".. now do they want to get rid of us quietly? .." (Acts 16.37)

Paul's visit to Philippi was eventful and fruitful: but it was also brief – and in leaving behind a fledgling church, he was keen to ensure they at least had the respect of the local authorities. Don't mess with God's people – earthquakes and worse may follow!

Why did Paul insist on the magistrates publicly escorting them from the prison?

How difficult is it to strike the balance between 'turning the other cheek' and refusing to be a 'doormat'?

Prayer: *Help me, Lord, to respond rightly when others have wronged me and done me harm; and teach me what it means in every situation to act justly and to love mercy.*

7) Sunday 25th June – encouraging the saints

Read [Acts 16.40](#)

".. they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them .." (Acts 16.40)

Believers are called to meet together and to encourage one another ([Heb.10.23-25](#)), spurring one another on to love and good deeds, and reminding one another of the faithfulness of God, as in times of trial we seek to hold on to our hope in Christ.

What would have comprised the encouragement Paul and Silas give the believers gathered at Lydia's house?

Reflecting on the whole narrative (from 16.13-40), in what ways may you be able to encourage fellow believers today?

Prayer: *Thank You, Father, for those who take time to encourage me in my walk with Yourself, and enable me to be an encourager of others today in what I say and do.*