

***Made To Worship:
Wide-Reaching Worship
Acts 16:13-34
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, June 27, 2010***

Do you ever lose sight of the “big picture?” Do you ever develop “tunnel vision” in your personal life and become blind to the needs of people around you?

My son Miles is obsessed with puzzles. It's not unusual for entire kitchen floor to be covered with 6 or 7 giant floor puzzles. It's like a mine field of Mickey Mouse and Elmo and the Little Mermaid. And it's so interesting to watch his little mind work because the way he “works” a puzzle drives me crazy. He takes a single piece, and he tries to fit that one piece in every possible place. When he strikes out, he lays that piece aside, and he moves on to the next piece. I have tried my best to convince this 3-year old to use the front of the box to cheat a little. “Look at the big picture,” I say. They put that on there for a reason, to help you make sense of all this.” But he won't listen.

Many people, scattered all over the earth, share in my son's lack of vision. For the Bible was written down by men carried along by the Holy Spirit, and it was given so that you and I can see the big picture in life, that we wouldn't get sucked into the current of our culture or the latest trend or ideology. God gives us all the “heads up” we need when we read his Word and apply it to our personal lives.

And what is the BIG Picture of the Bible? What is God doing through thousands of years of history? What is he up to? Well, I think I know. John Piper summarizes this well when he says:

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.” --John Piper

Now hear me, what Piper is not saying is that missions is unimportant and should be pushed to the backburner. Quite the opposite. What he's saying is, God desires to fill up the earth with worship. He is not satisfied with an Englewood here and there and one over there and there. This church is a worshipping church and the Lord desires for worshipping people to pepper the earth and to fill it. This is the Big Picture of the Bible—God saving people from various places, plucking them out of darkness and into the light, and creating worshippers across the earth. In fact, that's what heaven is, according to the book of Revelation. It is a place that is covered with redeemed worshipping people.

In Acts 16, we find a small group of missionaries who have set out to bring others to Christ, to spread the Gospel, to propagate new worship centers. The mission team is made up of: Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. This four-some has set sail to the city of Philippi, a city that was a leading metropolitan and commercial hub, but had virtually no Christians.

I want to read to you now the miraculous conversion of several people and show you the big picture of this passage of Scripture. Follow with me...

Acts 16:13-34

Raise your hand if you have ever flown on an airplane? Ok. Now raise your hand if you have ever had the opportunity of sitting in the window seat? Those of you who have enjoyed that view know that when you fly into a city, virtually every house looks the same from the sky. Sure, some are larger. Some are shaped differently. But they all those roofs appear similar and you can't tell from that view what life is like inside those walls. All we see is the outside.

But this isn't true of God. Just as Jesus can see what's in the heart of a man. God can see past the sheetrock into our living rooms. And he can see where his houses of worship are located.

In the city of Philippi, there weren't many houses that were filled with the Gospel truth. This was a pagan city, but because of its strategic location along travel routes, it was a hotbed for business, trade, and commerce. There was a lot happening in the streets, there just wasn't much happening in the Spirit realm.

So Paul pierces this culture and in this passage, 3 different people are dramatically changed by the power of the Gospel. Let's look at these three people quickly and then draw some conclusions about Luke's intent in tell these stories.

The Birth of the Philippian Church

1. The religious woman with an open heart.

Her name was Lydia and she was a transplant from Thyatira. She had come to make big bucks in the "rag business." She was a well-to-do dealer of fine cloth, and she was no atheist. She was a worshipper of God and since Philippi had no Jewish synagogue, the Jewish women gathered by the river in prayer every day. Like so many in our world today, Lydia acknowledged that this world did not happen by accident, that she was a created being, and that there was a God in heaven who was worthy of worship. But her picture of God was incomplete because she had not heard that her religion had been cancelled by a relationship with Jesus. Today, Lydia would be a good, unconverted church goer, but unfortunately, blind to her own lostness.

And the Bible says in v.13 that Paul and the missionary team began to share about the cross and the substitution of Christ for their sins, and the cancellation of the old code, and the salvation that comes by grace. And these words are written, I love them, "And the Lord opened her heart to respond."

Has the Lord ever opened up your heart? I hope so! It's the only way to be saved, it's the only way to overcome a grudge, it's the only way to live in victory! When God opens our heart, we can receive new life. And this woman became the first member of First Baptist Phillipi. She was baptized, her family became Christians, and it is believed that her home became the first sanctuary in that city. She was well off and likely had a large house, and she was able to house the early, growing church. What a great testimony.

2. A slave girl with a possessed heart.

Beginning with v. 16, a new character enters the stage and she is the most annoying person that Paul has ever met. She just keeps screaming, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." This girl had some serious mental issues that were brought on by spiritual attack. She also, was like a circus monkey, who created good revenue for her show-and-tell owners.

Paul put up with her for several day, it says. I thought about this situation this week. As a preacher, it's hard to preach when there are distractions in the room. You all don't notice them probably as much as I do, but people who do public speaking will say that Pet Peeve #1 are the people who make it hard for others to listen.

Imagine if I was preaching today, a person stood up, and said, "This man is preacher of the Most High God. He's speaking the truth!" Once would be appreciated, perhaps even encouraging. Twice would be strange. Three times, and I'm calling security.

Paul was a preacher who put up with this loud listener for several days. V.18 says, "She kept this up for many days, and finally Paul had had it." He looked at her, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, he set her free from demonic, dark forces in her life. It says, "at that moment, the spirit left her."

Now it doesn't go on to say that she became a key leader in the church or that she was saved. It would be projecting a meaning onto the text to say that she became a Christian, but tradition suggests that she became the second member of First Baptist Church of Phillipi. We shall know for sure one day in glory.

However, at the very least, we know this. We know that the power of Jesus had created a brand new life for her. She was shown grace. She received a new beginning and a fresh start. What a great testimony.

3. A man with a hard heart.

This is the story of the Phillipian jailer who almost took his own life before receiving Christ as his Savior. He was a split second away from hell but the gospel came to him through the lips of Paul. It was Carl F.H. Henry who wrote:

The Gospel is only good news if it gets there in time. –Carl F.H. Henry

And the reason that this man and his entire family sits in heaven today is because Paul refused to host a pity party as he sat in jail. Just look and marvel at v. 22-25...

It was the soft singing of grown men that melted the heart of hardened criminals and this jaded jailer. To be a prison guard required a certain level of callousness and ruthlessness. If just one of those prisoners escaped that cell, the life of the guard was required. So you could not survive in this occupation and be a pushover or a patsy. You had to show grit and fierce commitment to your call.

You know, there is a maximum security prison in New York, where some of the most brutal killers are housed today. The name of that prison is "Sing Sing." The name is derived from an old Native American word.

But I find great irony here that Paul call converts this prison to Sing Sing when he and Silas hold a late-night concert and they are singing praise songs and hymns to God, even with lacerated backs, feet locked in stocks, and blood scabbing over on multiple places on their bodies. This worship service softened the hearts of calloused criminals, and it opened up the heart of the jailer.

Then came the earthquake, and then came the sound of angels singing in heaven as a sinner was turned to saint. And v.30 states the supreme question that ever soars from sinful lips, "What must I do to be saved?"

And v.31 declares the simple gospel truth: Believe in the Lord Jesus. We are saved by grace through FAITH.

Now, before we take the Lord's Supper, I want to draw two monstrous conclusions about the Gospel that we are about to celebrate through the bread and the cup. I want you to see what Luke saw and wrote about:

Two Truths About Worship

1. Worship can be born in ANY person.

That's what Luke REALLY wants you to see. This passage isn't about prison ministry. It's not about demons and spiritual warfare. It's not even about the role of women in the church and how wonderful it is that the first member of the Phillipian church was a woman. Those truths are all secondary and subordinate to this one main golden nugget presented in Acts. That is, God is no respecter of persons. He doesn't care...

- What skin color you have.
- What country is listed on your passport
- What number is listed on your Gross income for your tax returns
- What family you come from
- What county you call home
- What level of education you have
- Whether you are male or female
- In junior high or in your senior adult season
- What height, or shape, or weight you have has NO bearing on the kingdom.

When the Gospel goes forth, a church is born and there is no pre-requisite for adoption in God's family, a part from a personal decision to put your faith in Christ alone. This church and every church is made up of miscellaneous trophies of God's grace.

Do you know what this is? This is a box of chocolates. A great theologian once said, "You never know what you're gonna get." When I open up this box, I find a random assortment of candies. They have some similarities, but they are purposefully unique.

And when you read Acts 16, you can't past the fact that a wealthy woman who deals cloth is put in the same box as the sorry slave girl who can't keep her mouth shut. And this sorry slave girl is positioned equal and right next to a middle-class crusty prison guard. All three of these people are as different as night is to day, but they have this ONE thing in common. They have received grace. And they have been touched by the saving hand of Christ.

The Lord's Supper was put into place by Jesus Christ 2000 years ago, and until HE comes again, HE wants this Supper celebrated as a visual reminder that we are all part of ONE body and we eat of one bread, and we have been saved by one man's blood.

The church is made up of worshipping people, all plucked out of the same darkness. So don't you dare approach this table without a sense of reverence, awe, and gratitude that you have been included, that God has saved you from sin, and seated you in his family.

2. Worship can be born in ANY place.

Right now, as I speak, you are located at 2239 N. Highland, Jackson TN 38305. More specifically, you are sitting in a sanctuary. The word sanctuary means, "a place of refuge or protection." And so when talk about wildlife, we say that we built a sanctuary because that area is free from predators and hunting is illegal.

When we come into this building, we enter a sacred space. It's sacred to me because I have seen the power of the Holy Spirit more in this round room than in any other location on earth. I thank God for this sanctuary, but let's be sure that we understand theologically that this building cannot and should not house all of Englewood's worship.

Lydia worshipped the Lord by a river, as the apostle Paul shared the Word of God with those women. Lydia's first true worship service was an outdoor women's prayer meeting.

The slave girl was traveling with the missionaries from place to place when suddenly, the power of God overcame her and she was set free. She was not in a temple or a church.

The Philippian jailer was in dirty, dark prison cell where human stench ruled and reigned. He was at on the job when he experienced his first true worship service and was saved.

Paul said this to the Corinthians:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 1 Cor. 6:19-20

So the question this morning is NOT: how clean is this room? The Lord isn't so concerned about the state of the carpet, or if the color on the walls is current, or if the room has good aesthetics. God does not scrutinize the paint or the style of this pulpit. However, God does look to see the current state of your heart.

Are you, like Paul and Silas, are you a movable tent of worship? Are you taking Jesus with you everywhere you go? Because I can paint for you the big picture of this Bible. I can give away the ending. God's great aim is to get the gospel to every ear that will receive, every heart that will be moved, every man, woman, boy and girl who will gladly believe on the name of Jesus and be saved.

As we take the supper together this morning, search your heart. Are you living the life that Christ has called you to live? Are you protecting your testimony? Are you showing people the big picture with the choices you make every single day? This GOSPEL is for every one and for every place.

