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Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, January 9, 2010
"When God Shows Up"
Acts 16:8-40
Introduction To The Philippian Letter

I was listening the other evening to an atheist being questioned on a television program. He was convinced that it was a fact that any belief in God was a myth. He thought that people were being misled and misguided.

The thing which wasn't asked of him was how did he arrive at the fact that a belief in God was a myth. Then, was his own limited reason capable of arriving at that conclusion. Of course not. He only had available to him his limited reasoning which kept him from knowing all the information that was at hand. He could only think in his little box which meant he thought he had complete information when he actually didn't.

When the Apostle Paul and his team came to Philippi, as recorded in Acts 16), on his second missionary journey around A.D. 50, they experienced the reality of the biblical eternal and personal God at work for them and in them. Taking the record for what it says, completely demolishes the atheistic idea that believing in the biblical God is a myth.

**** Paul's reason for coming to Philippi (show map).**

Paul had come to Philippi after receiving a vision call, while in Troas, from a man in Macedonia (Greece), asking for help, meaning that he was spiritually bankrupt (Acts 16:8-10). Paul and his team came by ship and arrived at Neapolis, Philippi's port. Philippi was 10 miles inland from Neapolis.

**** The city of Philippi.**

Philippi was a Roman colony, which meant it was like a part of Rome that was transplanted abroad. As a result, those who lived there had citizenship in the colony, while having the same rights as if they lived in Italy.

Enjoying all the rights of Roman citizens everywhere, they had the freedom from scourging, from arrest except in extreme cases, and the right to appeal to the emperor. Their names remained upon the rolls of the Roman tribes. Their language was Latin. They loved to dress according to Roman style. The coins of Philippi bore Latin inscriptions. Each veteran received from the emperor a grant of land. By having such colonies, not only did the residents profit, but Rome profited from the arrangement by having its frontiers safeguarded against the enemy and its veterans were rewarded.

The area was first called Krenides, meaning "The Little Fountain." King Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, enlarged this town and called it, Philippi, after himself in 356 B. C. There was gold in that region, and Philip secured more than 1000 talents a year, using some of the revenue to maintain his army, and some to enlarge his kingdom by means of bribes. By about 168 B. C. the gold mines were nearly exhausted.

Philippi became famous in 42 B.C. when nearby the forces of Brutus and Cassius, defenders of the Roman republic, and those of Antony and Octavius, avenger's of Caesar's death on the other. After two engagements Antony and Octavian were victorious, Brutus and Cassius were dead. Soon afterward Philippi was made a Roman colony. Eventually, Octavian became the sole leader, the emperor of Rome in 29 B. C.

****Religion in the city of Philippi.**

In the city of Philippi was emperor worship. The ideas of the Gnostics who believed that matter was evil were present. Satan was at work there as Acts 16:16 tells us that there was a slave-girl there who had a spirit of divination. That meant she was demon possessed and was being used by her masters for profit in her fortune telling. There were more than likely atheists present there as there are today, like the gentleman on the television program I mentioned at the beginning of this message.

****Paul and his team's stay in Philippi.**

Into this environment came Paul and his evangelistic team. This team was made up of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, as Luke joined the team in Acts 16:10, for it says, "we" sought to go to Macedonia. Now Luke was writing from first hand experience as he joined with Paul and the others.

They stayed in Philippi some days perhaps getting the lay of the land in this new city. Then on one Sabbath they went by the river, probably the Gangites River. There were probably few Jews in this city, and because of that there was no synagogue, for it took 10 men to establish a synagogue. Somewhere along this river Paul and his team discovered there was a gathering for prayer.

****Meeting Lydia.**

They began speaking to the women who were gathered for prayer and discovered Lydia a seller of purple who was from Thyatira, which is now Akhisar, Turkey. She was a business woman, a seller of purple. This would be no surprise for where she came from was in the center of the purple-garment business. Such garments were very expensive, for the purple dye was derived from the shellfish in the waters of Thyatira, and the throat of each shellfish produced only one drop of dye. Since Philippi was a Roman Colony, it was naturally an excellent market for purple garments. The Romans loved the royal rugs and tapestries. The Philippians were eager to copy Rome and its customs. To handle this expensive product, Lydia must have been a woman of means.

Since Lydia later prevailed upon the evangelistic team to stay with her (Acts 16:15), it has been suggested that she may have had a spacious mansion in Philippi, perhaps a typical Roman town-house of the better class that could accommodate several guests.

The text in Acts 16:14 tells us that she had become a worshipper of God. Though raised in paganism in her home town she had become a proselyte to the Hebrew faith. When Paul found out who she was, he explained to her how Christ had fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. Acts 16:14 tells us that the Lord opened her heart, that is she became a believer in Jesus Christ. Her household also became believers in Jesus Christ, and they were baptized (16:15). Whether this happened at that first encounter with Paul and his team we are not told. It seems like it did, but there were other times of meeting with the evangelistic team. Acts 16:16 tells us that they returned to that place of prayer again.

****Encountering Opposition.**

Making one of those walks to the place of prayer, Paul and his group encountered a young slave girl who kept following them and crying out, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). She kept doing this for many days, and finally Paul annoyed by this constant bombardment turned to her and commanded the spirit in the name of Jesus to come out of her. Immediately the spirit departed from the girl and she was made whole physically.

Such caused a great uproar by her masters. They no longer had someone to make money off of through her fortune telling. They seized Paul and Silas (evidently the main leaders of the team) and brought them to the chief magistrates, telling them that they were causing a great uproar in their city proclaiming customs which they as Romans cannot accept. The Romans thought Christianity was a sect and a menace. They were proud to be Romans although probably Jews.

****Thrown into prison.**

Paul and Silas had their robes torn off of them, they were struck with blows, and thrown into prison. Where their feet were put in stocks.

At midnight in prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing. Suddenly there was a great earthquake and the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately, the doors of the prison were thrown opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

When the jailer awoke, he was about to kill himself for he thought all the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out to not harm himself, for they were all there.

****The jailer's question (Picture of Jailer before Paul & Silas).**

Trembling, the jailer got some lights, ran into Paul and Silas, and fell down before them. He asked them what he should do to be saved. From the context in Acts 16:30ff, the jailer meant more than how could he save his physical life.

Certainly, he knew about what happened to the girl who had an evil spirit cast out of her. He must have noticed the demeanor of Paul and Silas in the lashings they received. Perhaps, he had been concerned about his own spiritual life for some time.

****The jailer's decision.**

Paul was given insight by the Lord that the man was talking about the personal salvation he needed spiritually for his individual life. He told the jailer to believe on the Lord Jesus, and he would be saved, and his household as well if they believed. Acts 16:31 is a famous verse in the Bible.

****The jailer's household decision and taking care of Paul.**

The jailer took Paul and Silas to his house and Paul evidently told them the gospel and those in the jailer's household believed as well. The jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas. He was baptized along with those in his house who had accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

The jailer also provided food for Paul and Silas and rejoiced greatly (Acts 16:34), having believed in God with his whole household.

****Release from prison.**

When day came, the magistrates of the city sent their policemen to the jailer to tell him to release them. The jailer told Paul that they could come out and go in peace (Acts 16:35-36). Evidently, the events of the jailer and his household accepting Christ, being baptized, and then taking care of Paul and Silas, all took place in the time period before the policeman came. Paul and Silas had even returned to prison.

Paul was not so quick to agree to what the policemen said could happen to him and Silas. Paul was a Roman citizen, which meant he should not have been beaten in public and thrown in prison without a public hearing. He told the policemen to let the magistrates come and bring them out of prison.

When the policemen reported Paul's words back to the chief magistrates, they were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Romans. They came and appealed to them, brought them out of the prison and encouraged them to leave the city.

****Return to the house of Lydia and moving on in their ministry.**

Paul and Silas left the prison and went to the house of Lydia. When they saw the brethren, they encouraged them, and the evangelistic team of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke departed eventually ending up at Thessalonica.

This is certainly a marvelous true historic and factual account of God working through the Apostle Paul and his evangelistic team in the city of Philippi. In fact, this was the first local church Paul established in Europe.

He became very good friends in the Lord with the believers at Philippi, and they even sent financial support to his ministry afterwards. One of the reasons Paul wrote the letter of Philippians was to thank the believers at Philippi for the gifts they sent to him when he was at Thessalonica (Philippians 4:16), and then, when they heard of his confinement in Rome, another gift was brought to him by Epaphroditus. That is getting into the letter of Philippians, which we will consider over the next few weeks.

My question today is, what do we learn for our personal walk with the Lord from the Act 16 account of Paul and his evangelistic team's ministry at Philippi?

First and foremost.

1. God is sovereignly working out His will to accomplish His good purpose to build His church through believers for His glory.

Jesus said that He would build His church and the gates of Hades, of hell, would not prevail against it. God had called Paul along with his team to be instruments in His hands to take the gospel to those who needed to hear the fantastic message of God's forgiveness and grace in Philippi at this time in history. In fact in reading of the Book of Acts, and specifically chapter 16 that we are considering, it is clear that what is happening here is not of man but of God.

The atheist can say that what is happening here is just happen chance. In fact, for him, it is just a nice story without any historical validity. Such denies the reality of Dr. Luke's telling the truth of how Paul and his team arrived at Philippi and what happened at Philippi

To live with trust only in one's own reasoning leads sadly to a dead end street with no way out.

Knowing God is sovereignly working out His will through us to build His church is an exciting reality that involves the believer being involved in eternity in time to further God's eternal kingdom.

That's what God wants to continue to do through us at Grace. He wants us not to be a maintenance church, but a church with a mission to build up the believers and reach out to our communities with the gospel of Christ.

I think we forget that sometimes in our walk with the Lord. What is our purpose here? Yes, to glorify God in all that we think, say, and do. But that involves growing in Christ and seeking to reach others who need to know the Savior personally.

Secondly,

2. We must be sensitive to God's working and open to where He is leading us.

God never drives us. He leads us. We must be alert spiritually to His nudgings and guidance in our lives. Jesus said that my sheep hear my voice and they follow ME. He leads us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The key is to keep listening to the Lord in His Word, and the nudgings He gives the believer by the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 16:6, Paul and his team thought they should go minister in Asia. The Holy Spirit didn't lead that way. They decided to go another way, but the Spirit of Jesus didn't lead that way either. But coming to Troas, they were called by the man of Macedonia to come and help them. Now they received the direction needed to minister for the Lord. He was leading them.

In one of our ministries, we were put in contact with a man through a family in our church. I had heard that he was in the hospital. I had made another call in the city where the hospital was and started to go home. Then I remembered (I believe it was God stirring up my mind) that this man was in the hospital where I was, so I decided to turn around and go back to the hospital to visit him. When I arrived in his room, he was all alone. We talked about spiritual things and where he was in his spiritual journey. Before I left, he asked the Lord to come into His life to forgive him of his sin and give him His eternal life.

Later I heard that the man passed away. I was asked to have his memorial service. I was able to share with those present that I knew that this man was with the lord because I had the privilege to have him pray with me to receive Christ as his personal Savior.

Be open to God's leading and when he is nudging you to do something, do it in His power to the glory of God.

I realize that it's sometimes easier to see God's leading in our lives when we look back than when we are needing to make decisions at the moment as to which way we should go or what we should do at certain times or in certain circumstances. Still God will give us His wisdom and guidance as we look to Him and obey Him.

John MacArthur has this to say about discovering God's will in his little book, "Found: God's Will."

If a person knows the Lord personally, knows what it means to obey the Spirit of God, is living a pure life, knows what it is to submit to authority, knows something about what suffering is, you are in God's will, so go serve Him where He is leading you.

He calls it being saved, Spirit filled, sanctified, submissive, and suffering.

Thirdly,

3. We must be open and willing to share the gospel as God gives us opportunity.

We are not told what Paul and his companions were doing in the city of Philippi for some days before meeting Lydia. Certainly they would have been checking out the city. I would like to think that the evangelistic team spent some time in prayer asking God for wisdom in how to reach the city, and to cause people to have a hunger and thirst for Jesus and His gospel. They may have been asking the Lord to help them establish a church there.

That's why we established Houses Of Prayer last year, and they continue on in this year.

Certainly God is available for individual prayer and for family prayer. But the church gathering for prayer collectively in groups or corporate prayer is God's desire for there is power in collective prayer. When Peter was released from prison in Acts 12, what was happening in the church of God. Were they having a committee meeting as to how to get Peter's release. Of course not. A prayer meeting was being held (Acts 12:5). God answered their prayers. When Peter arrived at Mary's house where the church was praying, the people had trouble believing that Peter had been released from prison. When they saw him, they were convinced.

When we realize the power of prayer, it takes precedence over what we think is important. That's how revivals in the church have started in the past. People get a vision of what prayer accomplishes. They start praying fervently and consistently, and God releases His power through His people.

Prayer gives us a readiness and boldness to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what happened when the Lord led the evangelistic team to the prayer gathering down by the riverside where they met Lydia who was ready to receive the gospel of Christ. Paul shared the good news and Lydia responded. Evidently others did too.

Who are you and I going to continue to pray for or pray for anew this year that needs to come to know Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Write their names down and continue or start praying for them.

Fourthly,

4. We must expect opposition to our witness and service for Christ.

As Paul and his team shared the gospel a slave girl, who was demon possessed kept following Paul and his companions saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). It's interesting that demons recognize who God is but many people don't. This happened in Jesus' ministry as well in Mark 5:7, with the man who was indwelt by an evil spirit. When Jesus came to the man, the man shouted out, "What business do we have each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? (or "What have you to do with me?) I implore You by God, do not torment me."

Demons know who Jesus is. Demons know what the gospel is, although they can't experience it. Rather, they are directly opposed to it.

Paul's casting out the demon in the all-powerful name of Jesus Christ, healed the girl, but her masters were furious because they had lost their business of fortune telling. This resulted in her masters grabbing Paul & Silas and bringing them before the leaders in the city, accusing them of throwing the city into confusion and breaking Roman customs. Such lead to Paul and Silas being beaten and cast into prison.

Of course, many since the time of Paul and Silas have been beaten and thrown into prison because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Many have lost their lives for the cause of Christ starting with Stephen in the New Testament. More Christians were martyred in this century alone than in all the past centuries combined.

Yes, there will always be opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ as long as Satan is on the loose. Satan always is doing his best to bring temptation to our lives, to disrupt the family or the church family. He continues to try and corrupt the government or bring down the economy. He goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour.

So the battle today in our world is not physical and material. The battle in the world today is spiritual. That's why Paul told the Ephesians that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

So the issue today is not the economy or education, or military might, or governmental power, or status, or possessions. The real issue is what is taking place in the hearts of people. Why is our nation so far in debt? Selfishness in the hearts of men. Why is God not acknowledged in the public arena? Man is blinded by Satan to think that he is god. Why is immorality flaunted in our society. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked who can know it.

That's why we need to be praying that God would through the blood of Christ bring down the strongholds of evil, lust, wrong us of power and possessions, and bring His righteousness and truth to bear on the hearts of men, women, boys, and girls.

That means, fifthly

5. We are to rely on the Lord for His strength and victory over the opposition as we live for the Lord.

Even though Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison, they still kept praying and praising the Lord. Praying for deliverance, praying for their enemies. Yes, and then praising God for His sovereignty and that He was in control. It has been suggested that they may have been using Psalms like Psalm 2, 16, 20, 23, 27, 42, 43, 46, 68, 69, 71, 130.

Praising God takes us off of ourselves and what we are experiencing, and focuses us on our Lord, who is in control and is working out all things for our good and His glory. Take king Jehoshaphat in II Chronicles 20. The Moabites and Ammonites came to make war against him. Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned to the LORD. God used Jahaziel to tell the king and his people to not be afraid for the battle was not theirs but God's.

He continued to tell the king and his people that they wouldn't need to fight, but to stand still and see the salvation of the LORD. Instead of fighting in battle, a praise team was formed from the Levites and they went before the army and said, "Give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness is everlasting" (II Chronicles 20:21). When they began singing and praising, the LORD set ambushes against the enemy so that they were routed. God gave the victory through the praise of His people. They called the place of victory, Beracah, which means "blessing." Jehoshaphat and his army returned to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies" (II Chronicles 20:27). They came to Jerusalem with harps, lyres, and trumpets to the house of the LORD. And the dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. So the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God gave him rest on all sides.

Perhaps, we have forgotten what praising God can do. That's why our praise here on Sunday morning is routing the enemy. Why praise in our personal lives routes the enemy. It's amazing what praising can do.

But there is something else in this historic event in Acts 16.

6. Our extremity is always God's opportunity.

Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and cast into prison with their feet put in stocks. It looked like Paul and Silas had come to their end.

Humanly speaking, yes, but supernaturally speaking, no. For who was on the throne? Not the atheists, the agnostics, or the doubters, even the so-called religious people. The biblical God was on the throne, working all things after the counsel of His own will. God had other things for Paul and Silas to do. It was not their time to end their lives on earth. It was time for God to act. He heard the praying and praising of Paul & Silas. His heart was moved and in their extremity with feet in stocks, God acted by sending a great earthquake. At the opportune moment, God showed up, and provided deliverance for Paul & Silas. Through their deliverance the jailer and his family came to know Christ as Savior.

What is happening here, is that God was honoring, in this situation, the faith of Paul & Silas.

Does God deliver like this at all times those who are in such distress. Obviously not for later Paul's life would be taken and the other apostles as well. Even today, many believers are put in prison and eventually their lives are taken. The recent attacks on Christians in Egypt is a case in point that not always does God provide deliverance.

God, however, does honor faith. I remember my wife's father telling me in the work into which God lead him and his wife, that he would go to the post office and just enough money came in to take care of the financial needs. I remember in one our churches we had a real need, we made the need known, and just enough money was given to take care of the situation at hand. Such happens here at Grace.

God does honor faith. Our extremity is always God's opportunity. We only discover that as we take God at his word and act upon it. If we live by sight as followers of Christ, we never experience God's direct involvement in our lives.

7. It is God who is working all the time even though we may not know how, or what God is up to.

The book of Philippians has different themes. Paul wrote that for him to live is Christ, to die is gain. We are to let the humble mind of Christ be active in our lives as followers of Christ. We are to count all things loss for the sake of Christ. We are to forget what is behind and press to the goal for the prize of the upward call of Jesus Christ. We are to rejoice in the Lord always, and again, Paul penned, I will say rejoice. We are to be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make known our requests to God. God will supply our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

But the book of Philippians starts with that famous verse in 1:6, "For I am confident that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ."

God has begun a good work in the believer in Christ, and will bring it to maturity.

Then Philippians 2:13 (our year verse) tells us that God is at work in the believer both to will and to work for His good pleasure (good purpose).

In Philippians 4:13, Paul penned that the believer can do all things through Him (meaning Christ), who strengthens me.

What was happening to Paul and his evangelistic team at Philippi was that God was at work in the city and in and through them. When Paul penned the Philippian letter some 8-10 years later, while he was in prison in Rome, he remembered how God had worked when he ministered there. Now hearing from Epaphroditus that God was still working in the Philippian believers, He encouraged them on to let God continue to work in their lives – to cause them to become more like Christ. They must not rest on God's past accomplishments in their lives, but they must press on for the prize of being in Christ's presence.

Paul knew that the living God was always working in the world, and in the lives of believers as they kept living by faith in Him. Perhaps at times, the believer may not know exactly how or even what God may be doing, but the believer can rest assured that God is working in him, through him and for him.

God is working in the believer for His good pleasure, that is for the believer's best so that God will be glorified through him.

That means that God is working through our challenging times and is there encouraging us at all times. This is true in our personal lives, our family lives, our church life, and in our other relationships.

God is always working in us, through us, and for us. He has our best interests in mind every day in this New Year, 2011.

Our year verse in Philippians 2:13 gives us the promise.

"For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (His good purpose).

Let's be available to the Lord this year to let him accomplish through us all that is for His good purpose – His glory.

For God is working, as the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, sings.

**God is working even now
Though we often know just how,
God is working, He's still working.
God is working even now.**

Though you cannot see,

**And you can't quite understand,
Remember God is in control.
He has promised not to leave us.
Somehow, God is working even now.**

**Hallelujah, He's working even now.
Though we often don't know just how,
God is working, He's still working,
God is working even now.**

**God is working He's working Even now.
God is working even now.**

Why?

Because God is working in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure.