

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned round and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, 'These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.'

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Following on from last week, Paul and Silas are still in Philippi. When they were in Troas, Luke must have joined them as in verse 10 the narrative changes from "they went" and "they did this or that", to "we did this or that". We now have first hand information from Luke as to what is happening, and more detailed accounts of what is happening.

Paul's character is also being revealed more. He has an argument with Barnabas because of Mark leaving them. Now he demonstrates irritation when a spirit possessed girl keeps following him – but let's give him credit, she did this for several days. The question arises how did a slave girl manage to follow Paul and Silas around for days without her owners keeping her away to do her fortune telling for paying customers? It makes us realise that slaves weren't quite what we think slaves would be, but had a lot of independence and time to do what they liked. We think of slaves as being closely supervised by masters or overseers, slaving away at their work, but in the Greek and Roman world, they were more like unpaid staff who got board and lodging, clothing and had set tasks to do within the confines set by their owners. They were often highly educated and taught the masters' children, they were sometimes advisors having studied philosophy, military tactics, rhetoric and history; they were often house servants: cooks, cleaners etc. This girl had a gift of fortune telling and knowing the future. Slaves just weren't free to look for another job or master, and could be sold to another master. This slave girl appears to be telling the truth. We've seen other instances of truth telling spirits – we saw it in Mark 5 when the demon Legion asked "What do you want with me, Jesus Son of the most high God?". The NIV translation says "*These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.*" The Greek says "who announce to you a way of salvation". There is a subtle difference between "the way of salvation" and "a way of salvation", as the latter implies that there are other ways. So what she says is nearly all true but not 100% accurate, which is often what the devil does. He twists the truth to deceive. Today many will say there are other paths or ways to salvation. That is not what Jesus says and the exclusivity of the Christian message is something many do not want to hear, because it says all other paths are the wrong paths. Jesus says "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me". If the slave girl really said "who are telling you the way of salvation", then wouldn't Luke have written that, to include the definite article? A small point, which doesn't alter the fact that proclaiming Paul and his team are servants of the Most High God, which could mean Zeus or any other Greek god that people thought was the most high. Jesus isn't mentioned.

Analysing carefully what the girl says shows she is detracting from Paul's message that Jesus saves, and that is precisely what the devil wants. He wants to put people off the true message of salvation.

Paul was then "*so annoyed that he turned round and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.*" We live in a world where demon possession and exorcism has become something that is OK for horror movies but isn't believed to be a reality. Up until recently, pretty much everyone in every part of the world recognised the reality of spirit possession and that exorcism to be rid of evil spirits was something that could be done. In the Greek and Roman world, spirit possession was known to be real –

and the fact that money was being made from it was seen as normal, especially if the predictions of the future were pretty accurate. In the Old Testament (1 Samuel 28) it says Saul had expelled all the mediums and spiritists from the land and there was only the witch of Endor left. She was able to call out the spirit of Samuel who told Saul what would happen to him. The law of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Leviticus 19:31, 20:6 and 20:27) required all mediums and spiritists to be killed because God knows they always tell half truths and often tell lies – they twist the truth, and those who seek the advice of mediums to be cut off from Israel. There is real danger in using Ouija boards, going to mediums to call up the dead, because doing so will open the way for possession by evil spirits or oppression by evil spirits. Holy Spirit cannot dwell in us if there is another (or many other) spirits dwelling in us.

The result of the spirit leaving the girl is the end of her usefulness as a fortune teller. Her owners (unusual to have several owners, but they doubtless bought shares in her) were doubtless livid. Their claim was that Paul and Silas had been advocating customs unlawful for Romans – note the Philippians deemed themselves Romans not Greeks, as it was a colony – to accept or practise. Rome did have effectively a state religion, where each home had its household gods and people worshipped whatever other gods they deemed to be most favourable towards them. Paul's message was that Jesus was the only way, the truth and the life, and basically saying every other god was a false god. The charge against Paul and Silas was that they were bringing in a new religion and trying to upset the existing order. It seems the exorcism wasn't the basis of the charges, but that they were bringing "disorder". Plus they were Jews who the Romans knew were difficult because of their unwillingness to participate on any festivals or religious activities that the Romans felt everyone should join in with.

Bringing Paul and Silas to the market place, where the magistrates dispensed justice which was watched by crowds who gathered there, on a charge nothing to do with their loss of income, was a clever move. The magistrates listened to the locals, and it seemed the crowd was against these Jewish foreigners, so summary justice was meted out with a flogging and imprisonment. Paul and Silas appear not to have been given a chance to defend themselves. As we shall see next week, this had consequences that the magistrates didn't reckon with when they airily sent Paul and Silas to be punished for allegedly disturbing the peace. Reading Roman history, those whose deeds are recorded, usually had a good sense of right and wrong and the need to hear both sides of a dispute. However Emperor Claudius had recently expelled Jews from Rome because they allegedly caused disorder. Doubtless word had got to this Roman colony surrounded by Greeks. There was a precedent for dealing contemptuously with foreign Jews, which smacks of anti-Semitism. As mentioned last week, Paul and Silas didn't go to the synagogue, as there probably wasn't one in Philippi, which indicates that there were too few Jews for one. You need ten men at least to be present at most Jewish ceremonies. Anti-Semitism is often worst in places with very few Jews and is often based on crooked exaggerated reports of what happens elsewhere rather than from any personal dealings with Jews. Reports from Rome would have come saying Jews were trouble makers so ridding the city of Paul and Silas (no mention of Luke being with them) was seen as justifiable Roman policy.

So Paul and Silas end up shackled in prison, a place that was probably rather nasty and cold. We'll see next week that this didn't discourage them. Paul boasts in some of his letters of the beatings he has had (in Lystra Paul was left for dead after being stoned by the crowd, many of whom were Jewish), and finds hardship and opposition makes him all the more willing to spread the Gospel. There are only two times when Paul is attacked by Gentiles – and both times for economic reasons. This time because the owners of the slave girl had lost their livelihood, and the other time in Ephesus when the makers of religious artifacts felt threatened by people abandoning belief in Artemis. Paul was most often attacked by Jews who didn't accept that Jesus was the Messiah. They still don't accept Jesus and many orthodox Jews in Israel today want to halt any Christian evangelism as it threatens the status quo... nothing has changed in 2,000 years! Yet we know that one day every knee must bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11 and Isaiah 45:23).

What can we take home from this account? Be bold, be strong, for the Lord our God is with us, whatever the circumstances. We will face opposition, often for reasons nothing to do with the words of Jesus. Just like Jews face anti-Semitism from people without any proper reason, so also do we face opposition from people without any proper reason: they simply hate what they think we believe (mostly they don't know what we believe) because they think we are intolerant when in fact they are intolerant. People usually accuse others of what they are guilty of themselves. We are told to love our neighbours, but above all love God and His ways. Love usually triumphs over ignorance – and sadly the nation's ignorance about who Jesus really is and what He said is at an all time high, especially among the young. We live in hope, we live to continue worshipping and praising God, we live to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. We know that one day every knee must bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Let's pray