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Sermon Study on Acts 16, 16-32

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Finally, let us turn to the influence and mission of the prophets and sons of the prophets. Jehovah had sanctioned the establishment of the monarchy in Samuel's day. Still, in spirit, the government of the Israelites was to remain a theocracy, and the prophets were to be "watchmen," **מִשְׁמָרִים, מִבְּרָרִים**. See Micah 7, 4; Jer. 6, 17; Ezek. 3, 17; 33, 7.

This office of watchmen was to be exercised both toward the nation in general and the rulers of the nation in particular. The latter could not, on theocratic principles, be observed and controlled by representatives of the people, but only by the immediate agents of Jehovah. We can recall Samuel reproving Saul, Nathan indicting David, Elijah braving Ahab. Even sons of the prophets were sometimes assigned regular duties of the prophet. 2 Kings 9 we are told: "Elisha, the prophet, called one of the sons of the prophets and said unto him, Gird up thy loins and take this vial of oil in thine hand and go to Ramoth-Gilead." He was to anoint Jehu king over Israel, certainly an important commission.

And when Ahab had allowed Benhadad to escape, 1 Kings 20, "a certain man of the sons of the prophets" met him and by feigned action succeeded in having Ahab pronounce judgment upon himself. Ahab regarded him on a par with the prophets and "went to his house heavy and displeased."

However, God did not limit His revelation to this organization of prophets. Concerning Amos, *e. g.*, we read (7, 14, 15): "Then answered Amos and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son, but I was a herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto My people Israel."

Amos lived in the time of Jeroboam II, during the latter days of the Northern Kingdom. It is in the passage quoted that we meet for the last time the expression son of a prophet, **בְּנֵי נְבִיאִים**, and consequently here have the last trace of the schools of the prophets. We must assume them to have been extinct at the time of the Maccabees, 1 Macc. 9, 27; 14, 41.

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Sermon Study on Acts 16, 16—32.

(Eisenach Epistle-lesson for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity.)

Every preacher is under a debt of lasting gratitude to the patient plodders who have selected the various series of pericopes. The expository preacher especially is happy and contented in mind when he has a preselected portion of Holy Writ before him to be treated homiletically; for he is convinced that "the text, the text, is the thing

wherein he'll find the message of his King." With this conviction, mingled perhaps with a slight misgiving that the present text is somewhat long, we begin our labor in the Word by reading the seventeen verses in the Authorized Version.

"And it came to pass." With this familiar introductory formula of sacred history our text opens. We wonder just how often it occurs in the Old Testament and in the New Testament narrative portions. *"As we went to prayer."* Who are the "we"? Where is "prayer" being held? In which city or locality are "we"? At what period of sacred history are the events to be narrated happening? These and other questions rush in upon our mind at the very outset. But we read on.

There follows a very brief account of a damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, or, as the margin informs us, the spirit of a python. We are aware that right here we have a subject requiring further study; but we proceed. This damsel, whose name is not given, *"followed Paul and us."* "Us" — whom? Whatever the results of our research on "python," we observe the striking phenomenon so frequently met with in Bible-study, *viz.*, that even evil spirits reveal accurate discernment and knowledge of spiritual persons and things; these evil spirits knew the office and function of "Paul and us." The passage about Sceva, chief of the priests at Ephesus, whose seven sons were exorcists, suggests itself to our mind as a parallel, the evil spirit answering: "Jesus I know and Paul I know; but who are ye?" Acts 19, 13—18. We recall also Jas. 2, 19; Mark 1, 24.—Always interested in Biblical chronology, we note the indefinite time reference "many days," v. 18, almost as indefinite as "certain days" in v. 12, and we wonder why the writer of Acts in some instances gives us a definite note of time, for instance, chap. 17, 2; 19, 8, etc., while in other instances he contents himself with merely a vague reference to "certain days" or "many days."

Paul, grieved, exorcises the spirit of divination in the name of Jesus Christ, the success being instantaneous. Financial loss is involved, which, as so often happens, moves the damsel's masters, Mammon's servants, to speedy and violent action. "What communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" 2 Cor. 6, 15.—Silas is now mentioned as another individual included in the "we" of v. 16. We pause only to wonder why in the epistles (1 Thess. 1, 1; 2 Thess. 1, 1; 2 Cor. 1, 19 [1 Pet. 5, 12?]) this same Silas is unvaryingly called by the fuller name of Silvanus.

The quietly flowing narrative now becomes vivid, excited, dramatic. The references to market-place, rulers, magistrates, the charge, so strangely different from the python's testimony given at v. 17, the proud pitting of "Romans" versus "Jews" in the charge against Paul and Silas, — these matters all begin to fascinate us and will demand special study. Let us not fail at this first reading of our text to have

a vivid picture of the actual condition of Paul and Silas in their sudden affliction. They were brutally flogged, receiving many stripes, v. 23; they were thrust into the dark and dismal inner prison, with their backs bruised and bleeding, and their feet were made fast in the stocks. The magistrates' charge to the jailer reminds us of the similar charge of Judas to the Master's captors: "Take Him and lead Him away safely," Mark 14, 44. The attitude of the multitude, v. 22, the "crowd," causes the frequent query: *Vox populi, vox Dei*—really? We also recall that this flogging is but one of three inflicted upon Paul by Roman magistrates, 2 Cor. 11, 25, while of the Jews he received forty stripes save one, Deut. 25, 3, on five occasions. Read the entire passage at 2 Cor. 11, 21—33 after we have concluded our text-reading and impress the image of *suffering* Paul deeply upon your mind.—We wonder where the others included in the "we" of the passage are and what their thoughts of this sudden change in Paul and Silas's external condition may be. Where is the unnamed damsel whose liberation from the python's possession has been the immediate cause of all this tumult and turmoil? Do not fail to sense the great truth of our Christian faith concealed beneath the surface of our narrative, *viz.*, that God dispenses suffering and trial in proportion as we are *able* to bear it, 1 Cor. 10, 13; Matt. 20, 22, 23.

The superb and unexpected scene at v. 25 makes us pause in our reading. Paul and Silas, bleeding from those brutal stripes, fettered, their feet fast in the stocks, at midnight worshiped and sang hymns to God. Which hymns? Perhaps some passages from the psalms? At any rate, they were rejoicing that they were "counted worthy to suffer shame for His name," Acts 5, 41. How significant the little statement when we bear in mind the altogether unusual conduct of Paul and Silas: "And the prisoners heard them," were listening to them. They did not complain about being disturbed in their sleep. An unforgettable scene! Cf. Ps. 119, 62, 55.—Righteous judgment? Yes, read on. Once again in the course of sacred history there is suddenly a great earthquake. All the doors of the prison open, every prisoner's bands are loosed, yet no prisoner makes his escape. What a prototype in miniature of Judgment Day and the resurrection of the dead! Paul cries with a loud voice from out the inner prison to the startled and terrified jailer about to commit suicide, "Do thyself no harm." Observe the spirit of divine love back of those words of Paul. The jailer—note well—leads Paul and Silas outside the prison and then asks the well-known question, v. 30, used as a text a million times and always enlisting attentive hearers. Do not overlook the significant plurals "*they* said" and "*they* spoke," vv. 31, 32, not only Paul, but Paul and Silas. In their answer to the jailer's excited question we are struck by the rather unexpected addition "and thy house." The rapidly moving narrative comes to a quiet and

restful scene at the last verse of our text: they, Paul and Silas, spoke the Word of God to the jailer and to all that were in his house. Where, we ask curiously, did this instruction take place? Not until later, v. 34, does the jailer bring Paul and Silas up into his house.

Thus our very first step in preparing a sermon on this passage has been made. We have carefully and thoroughly read the text. We feel keenly that we have before us a fragment, somewhat large though it be, yet a glaringly incomplete fragment, of a larger literary unit. We *must* go back, and we *must* go forward in our reading of this part of Acts beyond this fragment of historical narrative if we wish to do justice to it in our sermonic treatment. In order to feel this all the more keenly, we read our text portion once more before proceeding with our work.

The Context. — As to the preceding context, we must go back at least to chap. 15, 36 in order to learn among other things how Silas came to replace Barnabas as Paul's companion on this second missionary journey, how, when, where, and why Paul added the third man, Timothy, to his *personnel*, how at chap. 16, 10 "we" includes a fourth man, Luke, the narrator, the beloved physician; how these four men come to be at Philippi in Macedonia after being prevented, hindered, thwarted, several times in their proposed itinerary by the Holy Spirit, 16, 6. 8. As to the succeeding context we must read on at least to the end of our text chapter, though for the sake of sensing the full and correct historical and geographic background of the story we ought to follow the course of the Gospel in Macedonia and Achaia up to chap. 18, 18.

The Spirit by a vision, *ὄραμα*, guided Paul to go to Philippi; used 7, 31 of Moses' vision at the burning bush, 9, 10. 12 of Paul's and Ananias's visions, 10, 3. 17. 19; 11, 5 of Peter's vision at Joppa and that of Cornelius at Caesarea, 12, 8 of what Peter supposed was a vision in the prison at Jerusalem. The vision is seen by Paul only at Troas, situated a few miles south of the ancient Troy or Ilium of Homer's poems. See 2 Cor. 2, 12. 13. Returning from his third journey, Paul tarried there a week, Acts 20, 6.

Instead of vainly endeavoring to identify the Macedonian man, let us rather note the work God calls the four men to perform in Macedonia. This is described as preaching the Gospel to them, v. 10, whereby the appeal of the man in the vision for help would be answered. — The voyage from Troas to Samothrace was past Tenedos and Imbros, and Samothrace was about half-way. Already on the second day they reached Neapolis, the harbor of Philippi, for the wind was well astern, hence the "straight run." (The return voyage required five days, Acts 20, 6.)

Though the vision at Troas was of a Macedonian man, the first contact of the four men was with a band of women who were meeting

for worship on the Sabbath outside the city, in a place of prayer "by a riverside," a circumstance indicating that there were not even ten Jews of eminence at Philippi to build a synagogue. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept," Ps. 137, 1. These words recur to our mind as we view this little gathering of women at the bank of the river outside Philippi, faithfully abstaining from the unholy haunts of idolatry. Paul, the former proud Pharisee, preaches to this little band of women. The conversion of Lydia of Thyatira, one of the cities Paul had "passed by," is recorded. (Read Rev. 2, 18—28.) She, with all her "house," is baptized and prevails upon Paul and his party, four men all told, to stay with her. She "constrained" us. The Greek word used here occurs but once more in the New Testament, at Luke 24, 29. In Phil. 1, 3 we have Paul fondly recollecting this first day in Philippi. Note that the principle of Matt. 10, 11 is still in operation. See also Acts 13, 50; 17, 4, etc., for "women" in the church.

The next experience recorded also concerns a woman, possibly a slave-girl. She is possessed by a spirit, a python, and carries on a profitable trade for her masters in divination (A. V., "soothsaying"). She "cries," "shrieks," after the four companions as they walk habitually to the place of prayer. Paul, grieved,—our colloquial "worked up" corresponds to the Greek word used,—expels the python. "Out went" the spirit, "out went" the hope of the masters' gain, vv. 18. 19. How little a human soul counts with the greedy getters of gain! This work of blessing bestowed upon the slave-maid calls for speedy revenge from the masters, whose greed for filthy lucre has met with interference. The quiet, restful narrative suddenly grows very exciting and throbs with movement, culminating in the unexpected conversion of the jailer, who comes to believe in God with all his house, at midnight, v. 34. The insistence of Paul and Silas upon their rights as Roman citizens is easily understood if we realize the meaning and importance of their good reputation and legal innocence for their future work in Macedonia and Achaia. Years later, in writing to the Thessalonians, Paul recalls the ill treatment and the insults he and Silas suffered at Philippi, 1 Thess. 2, 2. Whatever time the Gospel-messengers spent in Philippi, they have seen a congregation of believers come into existence; for before leaving the city in accordance with the request of the officials, Paul and Silas comforted "the brethren" who had gathered at Lydia's home. What of Timothy and Luke? we ask. Did they both remain at Philippi to continue the work of Paul and Silas? At any rate, when Paul at Rome, years later, writes his lovely letter to the Philippian "saints in Christ Jesus," he associates Timothy with himself and separately greets the "bishops and deacons" of the congregation, Phil. 1, 1.—How much upon second reading and further study of the passage we read between

the lines! What new light the letter to the Philippians throws upon our narrative, and *vice versa!*

Having studied the preceding and succeeding context, with only an occasional, but quite irresistible reference to the original text, we are now ready and more than willing to undertake the third step in our preparation for preaching, *viz.*, the intensive study of our passage in the language of Luke and Paul, the most richly rewarding part of our labor in the Word. We read the Greek text carefully, watching intently the quality of the Authorized Version. We are once more and increasingly impressed with the straightforward simplicity and admirable succinctness of the narrator's style and method. What a multitude of compound verbs!—Space forbids our recording all that engages our interest. A few examples of exegetical study must suffice.

V. 16. *Προσευχή*, "the place of prayer"; cf. v. 13. It is a technical word. Where there was no *synagog*, these Jewish places of prayer were almost invariably to be found by the side of a river, hence the *ἱεροῦζομεν*, v. 13. They consisted of a circle enclosed by some kind of wall, but without a roof; sometimes they were even without any outward enclosure.

Πύθων. Only here in New Testament; hence we must be supremely cautious. In Greek mythology it is the name of the Pythian serpent or dragon dwelling in the region of Pytho, at the foot of Parnassus, in Phocis, said to have guarded the oracle of Delphi, which was slain by Apollo. It is also the ancient title for the prophetess of Apollo Pythius, the slayer of the serpent. While Suidas and Plutarch use it of soothsayers, who were ventriloquists, and while the Septuagint renders the Hebrew צִיָּן by *ἰγγαστριμυθος*, Lev. 19, 31; 20, 6, 27, let us not be too sure that this is its meaning here. NB., she "shrieked" after them. The emphasis is on *μαντενομένη*. This is the demoniac phenomenon condemned from one end of the Bible to the other. Modern Spiritualism is the same demoniac delusion warned against so severely by precept and practise in the "sure Word of Prophecy." Luther renders it *Wahrsagergeist*; French version: *un esprit de Python*; Italian likewise: *uno spirito di Pitone*; Spanish also: *espíritu pitónico* (margin = *de divinación*); Vulgate: *spiritum pythonem*. Let us not neglect the study of demonology. "The secret things belong unto the Lord, our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever," Deut. 29, 29; Amos 3, 7. It is over against these revealed things that the demons say in effect always and everywhere: "Did God say?" Gen. 3, 1.

V. 18. *Διακονηθεῖς*, a strong word, used but once more in the New Testament, again by Luke, Acts 4, 2. As there the Sadducees were annoyed, "worked up," literally, by the apostles' teaching, so here, *vice versa*, Paul is "worked up" by the demon's testimony.

V. 19. *'Egypasia*. Cf. v. 16. Exactly our "business," *Geschaeft*. Used again Acts 19, 24. 25 of the silversmith of Ephesus. Judgment Day will present some terrible awakenings on the score of "legitimate" business. Get the fine contrast in the account before us: the wrath of the slave-girl's masters poured out upon helpless Paul and Silas and the great day of wrath with its righteous judgment.

For all the terms referring to Roman political institutions at Philippi, the Colonia Augusta Jul. Philippensis, as it is called in coin inscriptions, such as *ἀγορά*, *ἀρχοντες*, v. 19; *στρατηγοί*, *duoviri*, or "pretors"; *ῥαβδίσειν*, to beat with rods, 2 Cor. 11, 25; *ῥαβδούχοι*, vv. 20. 22. 35, see article by H. O. A. Keinath: "The Contacts of the Book of Acts with Roman Political Institutions," current volume of the MONTHLY, No. 2, p. 117, esp. No. 3, p. 191.

V. 27. Note the article, with the force: the jailer drew *his* (τήν) sword. What a graphic touch, as so often in Luke! Started from his sleep, he has drawn *his* sword; he is on the point of killing himself, supposing, *νομίζων*, see v. 13, that the prisoners have escaped. Acts 12, 19 informs us what happened to jailers whose prisoners escaped. Again we wonder how Paul could see this, for the jailer calls for lights, torches, before rushing into the prison. Whom does he ask for these lights? Note that, while he falls down before Paul and Silas, he leads them forth outside the prison before he asks the question which troubles his mind. Had he heard of their mission? If so, how? Perhaps v. 17 furnishes the answer. From these few inquiries we see how much is left unsaid, an excellent proof for the truthfulness of the account.

One more glimpse beyond our text is almost necessary. Note how beautifully the fruits of faith are described, as also in Lydia's case. The jailer washes the stripes of Paul and Silas, and having been baptized with the washing of regeneration, he and all his instantly, *παραχρημα*, he leads them up to his house, which has apparently been undamaged by the earthquake, — no harmful effects of the great quake are mentioned, — and sets the table, *mensam apposuit* (Vulg.), for them. We cannot help but think of Ps. 23: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." While they rejoiced in that house over the fact that they had come to believe in God, — NB. believing in God is identical with believing in the Lord Jesus, here and always, — there was also rejoicing in heaven over these sinners who repented toward God and had faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are keenly conscious of the fact that our illustrations of textual study are mostly concerned with minor matters. Our main purpose was to show how *interesting* a sermon study on the basis of the original text is. Our space is limited, and, besides, the great doctrinal subjects involved, such as conversion, Baptism, faith in Christ,

civil government, will be found adequately treated elsewhere, and sermons on the conversion of the jailer at Philippi are actually numberless. The setting is so superbly fascinating that the popularity of the text is readily understood.

It is time to preach now. The many impressions and side-lights must be reduced to a unity of subject. Acts being the account of Christ's earliest witnesses after His ascension, the subject most readily suggested by the text is: *Faithful Witnesses of Christ*. 1. The testimony they always and everywhere reject, vv. 16—18. 2. The testimony they always and everywhere proclaim, vv. 19—32. — *The Work of the Ministry*. 1. Toward the afflicted (deliverance, vv. 16—18); 2. toward the repentant (salvation by faith, vv. 30. 31.) 3. toward the unconverted (suffering innocently and patiently, yet insisting on "righteousness"—the magistrates, vv. 19—40). — *The Spread of Christ's Kingdom*. 1. The method (preaching, Baptism, Christlike conduct); 2. the result (Lydia, girl possessed, the jailer converted). — *Witnesses of Christ*. 1. Their relation to God, vv. 13. 18. 25; 2. their relation to the magistrates, vv. 19—40. — *The Disciple Is Not above His Master*. 1. In his work; 2. in his suffering.

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O. W. WISMAR.

Dispositionen über die Eisenacher Evangelienreihe.

Sechzehnter Sonntag nach Trinitatis.

Matth. 11, 25—30.

Jesus mußte über viel Mißerfolg klagen, Matth. 11, 16—24. Trotzdem fuhr er fort mit der Predigt des Evangeliums. Wie er die Zwölf ausgesandt hatte, so predigte er selbst, Matth. 11, 1. Auch wir haben nicht den Erfolg mit unserer Predigt, den wir uns wohl wünschten. Daher meinen viele, man müsse mit einem zeitgemäheren Evangelium kommen. Das wäre das Allerverkehrteste. In unserm Text zeigt Jesus, daß und warum er nicht im entferntesten daran denke, sein Evangelium zu ändern.

Fahren wir unentwegt fort mit der Predigt des Evangeliums Christi!

1. Das Evangelium macht auch die Übernsten wahrhaft weise.
2. Es schenkt auch den Ruhelosesten rechten Frieden.

1.

Jesus hat wahre Weisheit, B. 27. Alles ist ihm übergeben, in ihm ruht die ganze Fülle der Gottheit, Kol. 2, 9, also auch alle Schätze der Weisheit und der Erkenntnis. Kol. 2, 3. Daher kennt er auch den Vater, wie der Vater ihn kennt, B. 27. Als zweite Person der Drei-