

Set Free | Acts 16:16-40 | Dave Cover Sermon Discussion Participant Guide

Icebreaker: When is a time or a place you found yourself confused? Why?

Recap

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

In the book of Acts, one of the major themes is how the church faces opposition as it advances into more and more territory. Part of that opposition has been people who try to legally or even physically restrain the apostles from spreading the gospel. But occasionally, we get a glimpse that there are spiritual forces at work also seeking to block the advancement of the gospel. In the passage today, we see both types of opposition which can provide us greater awareness of the opposition we too will face as we strive to be witnesses.

Discussion

Acts 16:16

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.

Note: *Dave talked about the spirit or the "spirit of divination" in the ESV is a "python spirit" in the Greek. This is in reference to Apollo killing a giant, mythical snake, named Python. To have a python spirit was to channel the god Apollo to predict the future often in an ecstatic, trance-like state. Dave talked about Apollo not being real but the evil spirits being behind the mythical gods and our cultural gods are VERY real.*

Deuteronomy 32:17

¹⁷ They sacrificed to false gods, which are not God—
gods they had not known,
gods that recently appeared,
gods your ancestors did not fear.

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1 Corinthians 10:19-20

¹⁹ Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

1. If evil spirits are at work in a culture to prevent people from believing and following Jesus, how might they be at work in our culture? What are the values of our culture that are working against faith?

Acts 16:17-18

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 around 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.

2. While we might think the "python spirit-possessed" girl is aiding the mission, Dave mentioned that the problem is that the spirit is trying to distort the gospel by mixing itself into the message. How do you see this syncretizing at work today? How does this change the way you think about it?
3. How can we grow in discernment amidst this spiritual opposition?

Acts 16:19-24

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace 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 practice."

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.

4. The owners of the slave girl are motivated in their opposition to Paul and Silas by their own selfishness. How does that convict us personally as the gospel challenges our cultural values? What does that prepare us to potentially face?

2 Corinthians 7:5

⁵ For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within.

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Acts 16:25-40

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

5. In their fear, Paul and Silas turn to worship God. How can we worship God in our fears and hardships?
6. Despite all the ways they have been mistreated and abused, how do they respond after the earthquake? How is it a challenge to us?
7. By forcing the city leaders to publicly clear them of their charges, how do they benefit the believers still in Philippi?

Sharing and Prayer:

This passage shows Jesus freeing people in multiple ways—

- the slave girl from spiritual oppression
- Paul and Silas from fear

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- the jailer from spiritual darkness.

Where do you most need to experience Jesus' freedom right now? Pray silently asking God for freedom for yourself...

Who is someone you know who needs to experience Jesus' freedom right now? Pray silently asking God for freedom for them...

Have someone close in prayer.

Passages for the next two weeks:

- March 15: Acts 17:1-15
- March 22: Acts 17:16-34

Feel free to do your own study to prepare.