

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Series: Next!**

(studies in the book of Acts)

## **Gospel Opportunists**

(Acts 15:36--16:40)

Study #19

**Introduction:** When opportunity knocks...

We spit out the accusation, “*He’s such an opportunist!*” To be called an opportunist is generally not a compliment. Most always, someone or something that is opportunistic is viewed as negative.

For instance, medically speaking, an “opportunistic infection” is an infection caused by a germ that normally doesn’t cause disease in a person with a healthy immune system. But if the person has a compromised immune system, the dirty little *opportunistic* germ takes advantage, causes infection, and does great harm.

In the financial world, if one person takes advantage of his superior knowledge to further his own interests and does not disclose information to another party that he should have disclosed, then he is rightly accused of “opportunistic behavior.”

Opportunists turn situations to their own advantage – often at the expense of others.

If you know an opportunist, you may have a grudging appreciation for his or her ability to always land on their feet and make lemonade out of life’s lemons. But you probably don’t respect them for succeeding by opportunistically harming those around him.

But what if there was someone who had a special skill, a knack, for opportunistically turning everything that came his way to someone else’s advantage?

What if there was a way to be a LOVING opportunist?

This morning we are going to see some folks who were so taken by Jesus and His Gospel that they turned every lemon life handed them into a delicious lemonade and opportunistically served Him and blessed others.

Being Gospel opportunists is what the Second Missionary Journey was all about. And the invitation from God’s Word today is to mimic the missionaries’ loving opportunism.

Last week, we watched as the first century church dealt with the thorny issue of Jewish/Gentile relations. Guided by love, they negotiated that minefield and preserved the precious and fragile unity of the church.

Paul and Barnabas (along with Barsabbas/Judas and Silas) carried the decree of the Jerusalem Council to the church at Antioch. And, as expected, the young Christians there received the decree with joy and relief.

Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. They will not have to submit to the Mosaic Law. They can continue to embrace their own culture.

And Paul and Barnabas - along with Silas, who decided to stay in Antioch for a while (maybe he enjoyed the ham sandwiches he ate there....) - continued their fulfilling and fruitful ministry there.

However, after some time, Paul was ready to hit the road again.

### **Prelude: An Opportunistic God (15:36-41)**

#### **Road Trip! (v. 36)**

*[36] After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”*

We can easily understand his eagerness to check up on the new converts in Galatia.

They had made good friends there. They wanted to teach them more about life in Christ. They were concerned that the young believers continue to stand strong in the face of opposition.

But, as the planning for a second trip commenced, a problem surfaced.

### **To Go or NOT to Go - with John Mark...**

*[37] Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. [38] But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.*

Barnabas and John Mark were kin. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin along. Paul said, “*No way!*”

On the previous journey, just as the going got really tough, John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas. He left them high and dry. And Paul wasn’t about to risk another experience like that.

The disagreement between these two teammates continued. It intensified and the situation deteriorated.

### **Parting Ways (v. 39a)**

*[39a] And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another*

And so, the Dynamic Duo of the First Missionary Journey split up over the issue of whether or not to continue working with John Mark.<sup>1</sup>

For everyone who has had a somewhat idealized picture of early Christianity - here is a reality check.

Paul and Barnabas, two spiritual heavyweights, disagreed on methodology - not doctrine - and effectively ended their partnership.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As far as we know, they never worked together again.

<sup>2</sup> Paul later spoke warmly of Barnabas (1 Cor. 9:6; Colossians 4:10). He owed much to Barnabas and it appears they remained friends despite their difference over Mark.

As sad as that might make us (and as much as any of us might want to side with either Paul or Barnabas in this debate!), the reality is that God used this break-up to prove Himself the ultimate Opportunist.

The split up of Paul and Barnabas resulted in two missions teams. One team consisted of Barnabas and John Mark.

### **But...Multiplying Ministry (vv. 39b-41)**

*[39b]...Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.*

This voyage to Cyprus was likely intended to be a recovery trip for John Mark. Barnabas wanted to see his nephew restored to serve the Lord.

And, assuming that this was the goal - mission accomplished! We know from elsewhere in the New Testament that John Mark went on to become an exceptionally valuable Christian worker.<sup>3</sup>

The other team was made up of Paul and Silas.

*[40] But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. [41] And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

We’ve met Silas before. He was one of the men who took the good news of the Jerusalem Council to Antioch. Now, he replaces Barnabas as Paul’s right hand man.

Silas was a good, solid man, Jewish through and through. He loved the Lord, the Gospel, and the people for whom Christ died. And the journey that Paul and Silas are about to embark upon is what we refer to as The Second Missionary Journey.

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<sup>3</sup> John Mark wrote the second Gospel and was mentioned by Paul himself in the last chapter of Paul’s last letter (2 Timothy) as a man who was useful in ministry. However, after this incident, neither John Mark nor Barnabas are seen again in the book of Acts. As a matter of fact, not even Peter is mentioned after the Jerusalem Council! The remainder of the book of Acts centers on the activity of Paul.

<sup>4</sup> This is another way to phrase a church’s commissioning.

But notice what God has done. He has taken the breakup of the team of Paul and Barnabas and multiplied Gospel impact by adding another missionary team.

What does this tell us but that God is The Great Opportunist. He takes messed up situations, stuff that WE mess up - and redeems it.

When people like John Mark - or people like me or you - shoot ourselves in the foot, God will opportunistically work in our lives to weave that failure into our future success, His glory, and blessing to others.

He is willing and able to use anything - failure, sin, relational fractures, mistakes, dropped balls, as well as tragedies in which we have had no hand - and turn them to good.

That, after all, is the point of Paul's words in Romans, **[8:28] *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.***

Well, Paul and Silas launched their journey based on a desire to visit and build up the churches that had been planted earlier in Galatia.

So, traveling due west from Antioch, they came to Derbe and then to Lystra (the city where Paul had been stoned!). In Lystra, they met a young man named Timothy.

### **The Road that Leads to Philippi (16:1-10)**

#### **The Addition of Timothy (vv. 1-5)**

*Meet Timothy (vv. 1-2)*

***[1] Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, [2] and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.***

From Paul's writings we learn that Timothy mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) were believers.

Paul was so impressed with Timothy that he wanted him to take the place of John Mark and join him and Silas on the rest of this journey.

But, before he could come along, Timothy first had to be circumcised Huh?!

*Get Timothy circumcised?!?! (v. 3)*

***[3] Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.***

After all the fuss about there being a CIRCUMCISION NOT REQUIRED sign hanging over the door of the church, why in the world would Paul now require it of Timothy?

Well, Paul didn't circumcise Timothy because of anything having to do with his standing before God. And he wasn't bowing to legalists, either. It was done so as to not cause offense.

Despite his father's non-Jewishness, Jews of the first century would have considered Timothy to be Jewish on the strength of his mother's Jewishness. And, as an uncircumcised Jew, he would have been considered apostate by Jews. They wouldn't have paid him the time of day when he, an uncircumcised Jew, preached the Gospel. In fact, he would have been a stumbling block.

So, Paul's circumcising Timothy was a perfect, logical outworking of the Jerusalem Council's decree. Timothy was asked to not do anything that would offend the sensitivities of others. So, he submitted to circumcision so as to not to be a stumbling block to others coming to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Paul circumcised Timothy for the sake of an effective ministry. It was a smart move. It was opportunistic for the sake of the Gospel.

So, Paul, Silas and Timothy left Lystra together, at first mostly traveling through familiar territory.

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<sup>5</sup> Also consistent with the Jerusalem Council's decree was Paul's refusal to circumcise Titus, a full-blooded Gentile. See Galatians 2:3-5.

*Happily delivering GOOD NEWS! (vv. 4-5)*

***[4] Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. [5] So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.***

What a delightful journey this must have been. There's nothing so cool as delivering good news.

But somewhere along the way, the wheels started turning in the minds of the missionaries, *“Isn't there more we could do? Aren't there others who haven't heard the Gospel? Couldn't we go to new places?”*

I assume that those were the thoughts that Paul and Silas and Timothy were having, because when they left Pisidian Antioch they turned north (the opposite direction they had gone before) to go to regions where people had never even heard the Name of Jesus.

As they traveled, the Lord gave them direction. You might be surprised to hear that the first directions, while clear, were negative.

### **Called to Macedonia (vv. 6-10)**

*When God says, “No!” (vv. 6-7)*

***[6] They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region,<sup>6</sup> having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; [7] and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus<sup>7</sup> did not permit them;***

First in the mountainous region of northern Galatia and then in the more northern district of Bithynia, the threesome was told, **“No”**. And we aren't told how the Holy Spirit communicated His “No.”

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<sup>6</sup> The reference to *“the regions of Phygia and Galatia”* should probably be understood as referring to the Phrygian region of Galatia.

<sup>7</sup> The reference to *“the Spirit of Jesus”* is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

It may have been circumstances which the traveling group interpreted as God's direction. Or, it may have been a prophecy, a vision, or some other more overtly supernatural phenomenon.

They wanted to enter these regions with the Gospel, but they were not permitted to do so. Why? Who knows why?

Certainly, God wanted the people in these regions to hear the Gospel - and they did hear later. This simply was not God's timing.<sup>8</sup>

Learning to wait on God's timing is a hard lesson. I suspect that Paul wondered why God did not allow them to enter certain regions, why He forbade them from evangelizing in certain areas.

It is not uncommon for believers to wonder about God's timing, the “NO” and the “NOT YET” answers He gives to what we see as legitimate requests. Maybe you wonder from time to time about God's timing, too.

Why a closed door to this opportunity, now? Why a refusal for that job? Why not a life partner at this time? Why a “not yet” answer to this prayer?

Waiting is tough, but waiting teaches faith like few other things in life do. We learn by waiting that God is not on our schedule. We are on His. He calls the shots, and we submit to Him.

So, God first gave Paul **negative** guidance. However, in His good time, as they continued to travel, He provided **positive** guidance.

*When God says “Yes!” (vv. 8-10)*

After traveling what looks on a map to be something like five hundred miles (!), they arrived in the city of Troas, a coastal city on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea.

While there, God gave Paul a vision that let him know where he was to go.

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<sup>8</sup> It was God's plan for people in both Ephesus and Bithynia to hear the Gospel at a later time (Acts 18:19-21; 24-19:41; 1 Peter 1:1)

*[8] and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. [9] A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." [10] When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

So, "*immediately*" Paul, Silas, Timothy - and now Luke (you can tell Luke is with them because he says "*we*") - headed northwest across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia.

### **Gospel Impact in Philippi (16:11-40)**

#### **First Convert in Philippi (vv. 11-15)**

*Arrival in Philippi by sea (vv. 11-12)*

*[11] So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace,<sup>9</sup> and on the day following to Neapolis; [12] and from there to Philippi,<sup>10</sup> which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.*

After a brief stopover on the island of Samothrace, they arrived at the port of Neapolis. They then walked ten miles on the *Via Egnatia* to the city of Philippi.

Philippi was the leading city of Macedonia. It boasted a medical school, was a principal city for politics, culture, economics and trade, and was important as a Roman military post.

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<sup>9</sup> In Acts 20, it took five days to sail the other direction, because they were traveling against the wind!

<sup>10</sup> In 168 BC Philippi became a Roman possession. After Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, near Philippi in 42 BC, the city was made into a Roman colony. This gave it special privileges - like fewer taxes - but more importantly it became something like a transplanted Rome. The primary purpose of colonies was military, for the Roman leaders felt it wise to have Roman citizens and sympathizers settled in strategic locations. So Octavian (who became Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, in 27 BC) settled more colonists (primarily former soldiers) at Philippi after his defeat of Antony at Actium, on Greece's west coast, in 31 BC.

And once they hit town, Paul and his friends didn't wait long to begin sharing the Gospel. They opportunistically made their way to a place where they believed they might find a receptive audience.

*Successful ministry in Philippi! (vv. 13-15)*

Remember that it was Paul's habit to go to the Jews first in any city he visited. And that is exactly what he does in Philippi. He scouted around to find where the synagogue was - and found that there wasn't one.

See, in ancient times there could be no synagogue without ten Jewish men. There were not ten Jewish men in Philippi.

So the Philippian Jews congregated every Sabbath day at a "place of prayer" which happened to be a quiet spot beside the Gangites River that flowed through town.

*[13] And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.*

To this select group, Paul presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One of those present was paying extra close attention.

*[14] A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics,<sup>11</sup> a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart<sup>12</sup> to respond to the things spoken by Paul.*

And just like that - there is a Christian Philippian!

Shortly after she believed, the message went out to her household. They believed, too! And just like that, there is a community of faith in Philippi!

*[15] And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay."*

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<sup>11</sup> In the ancient world, the purple color was highly valued and was derived from a shellfish, the murex, or from the root of a plant.

<sup>12</sup> Notice how Luke stresses the sovereignty of God in salvation.

Well, imagine how jazzed Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke were about what was happening in Philippi.

The Lord obviously had great plans for this city. Maybe there would be a great outpouring of the Spirit. Who knows?!

Excitement was building. “Wow. One meeting and a whole household of believers! Wow. I wonder what God is going to do next?”

We don’t have to wait long to find out...

### **First Miracle in Philippi (vv. 16-18)**

*A tormented slave girl torments Paul (vv. 16-17)*

***[16] It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination<sup>13</sup> met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.***

Some men in the city were exploiting a slave girl. She was controlled by a demonic spirit who gave her the ability to predict the future.

The demon within also gave her the ability to know the source of Paul’s message.

***[17] Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”***

After some time, Paul became weary of this demon identifying him as a messenger from God.

Not that the demon was wrong - it was right! - but Paul didn’t want his ministry validated by a demon. He didn’t want any association with a demon! So, he took action.

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<sup>13</sup> The English words “*a spirit of divination*” translate two Greek words “*a spirit*” and “*a python*.” The concept relates to the Greek city of Delphi where the god Apollo was believed to be embodied in a python snake. The original priestess at Delphi was purported to be possessed by Apollo and thereby able to predict the future. Therefore, anyone possessed by the python spirit could foretell coming events. No doubt an actual demon gave such a person predictive powers.

*God’s power sets the girl free! (v. 18)*

***[18] She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit,<sup>14</sup> “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out at that very moment.***

So, PRAISE GOD for his wonder-working power! Wow - an exorcism!!

A captive has been set free. Well, it is outstanding good news. But the results of Paul’s action weren’t quite what he might have expected.

### **First Prison Story in Philippi (vv. 19-24)**

*Paul and Silas arrested (vv. 19-21)*

This poor, tormented slave girl had been the source of a lot of money for her masters. With the demon gone from her life, so was her ability to tell fortunes - and so was their income. They were really ticked off about that. So they took action, too.

***[19] But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities [20] and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion, BEING JEWS, (emphasis added)<sup>15</sup> [21] and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.”<sup>16</sup>***

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<sup>14</sup> Paul spoke not to the girl, but to the demon itself.

<sup>15</sup> The reason they take special pains to identify the missionaries as Jews is because of a spate of anti-Semitism that was spreading across the Roman Empire after the Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome (this action is referenced at Acts 18:2). Jews were not well thought of at this time in Philippi, and the charge that they are Jews ensures that the Gospel-preaching, demon-casting-out Christians are treated harshly. This also helps explain why Timothy and Luke were not taken before the authorities. They were not Jews. Luke was Gentile through and through and Timothy was half-Gentile.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, the civil leaders could not distinguish (what they would have seen as fine lines) between Judaism and Christianity. They saw the preaching of Paul and Silas as a flagrant infraction of imperial law.

Once they are identified as Jews (not that their Jewishness has anything to do with their “crime”), things went decidedly downhill.

*Paul and Silas imprisoned (vv. 22-24)*

***[22] The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.<sup>17</sup> [23] When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; [24] and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.***

This jailer was not going to take any chances. Jailers were often retired soldiers in the Roman army who knew something about fulfilling their duty. This guy knew his job well.

Don’t misunderstand. He wasn’t trying to make their lives more miserable by throwing them into the dungeon (“inner prison”) and placing their feet in stocks. He was just making sure that they couldn’t escape.

So, let’s summarize these recent experiences of Paul and Silas. After having, by the power of God, exorcised a demon and freed a young girl from torment, they are:

- accused of wrong-doing;
- physically hauled over to government officials;
- charged with crimes;
- found guilty of those crimes;
- publicly stripped;
- beaten with rods; and
- thrown into the deepest, darkest section of the Philippian jail with their feet in stocks!

This is what has happened to them after successful ministry, after serving God, after doing everything right. Surprised?

If you were in Paul’s stocks, what would be your reaction? What would be your temptation? Would you be tempted to cop an attitude?

I suspect that would be my temptation...

Many people read Acts 16 and are impressed with the miracle of exorcism we have just seen. Others are impressed with the prison miracle yet to come - and both are wonderful evidences of the power of God.

For my money, though, neither holds a candle to the awe-inspiring demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit to turn a heart God-ward in some really sick circumstances.

**Seconds (vv. 25-34)**

*2<sup>nd</sup> miracle - at midnight! (vv. 25-26)*

The jailbird’s song (v. 25)

***[25] But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;***

In tough situations, God’s people have found that the presence of God alone is sufficient good news to prompt worship.

What about you? Are you in prison? God doesn’t always keep His people out of prisons, and prisons can come in a variety of styles.

There are prisons of physical suffering, financial hardship, relational stress, and broken dreams. In all of that, God is with you. Believe it. He is with you in your prison. He has promised to never leave you, never desert you.

He is waiting for you to join Paul and Silas and to sing your heart out in praise and worship. I am convinced that the sweetest song that ever makes its way to Heaven is the song of the jailbird.

And maybe because of their beautiful worship, or maybe because He simply wanted to demonstrate His sovereign power in an awe-inspiring way, as their spirits were moved to worship God, God Himself moved.

He moved the jail.

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<sup>17</sup> This was one of three beatings Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 11:25. The “rods” was a bundle of rods lashed together and used as a whip on the prisoner.

Chains fall off! (v. 26)

***[26] and suddenly there came a great earthquake,<sup>18</sup> so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.***

From what I've heard and read, earthquakes are terrifying experiences. This one was probably scary, too. But it was also liberating!

Along with the prison walls shaking, prison doors were flying open and chains were unfastening themselves and feet were let free from stocks.

So, what will Paul and Silas do? What would you do? Walk out the door? Is God giving them the opportunity to escape?

Certainly that is what the jailer thought that they were going to do - which is why he prepares to take the action he does.<sup>19</sup>

*2<sup>nd</sup> conversion - a jailer (vv. 27-34)*

A panicked jailer (vv. 27-28)

***[27] When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.***

Above and beyond everything else, a Roman jailer was responsible for the prisoners - not their safety, their safekeeping. Escapes would guarantee the jailer's death. And this jailer would a whole lot rather die by his own hand than by whatever the Romans had in mind!

Paul spoke up when he saw what the jailer was intending!

***[28] But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"***

He and Silas were still there - and so were all of the rest of the other prisoners. None of them were selfish opportunists. They didn't take advantage of loose chains and open doors. They all stayed put.<sup>20</sup>

And when the jailer saw that nobody was leaving, he was undone!

A saved jailer (vv. 29-33)

***[29] And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, [30] and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"***

What a question! And what did he mean by that question? Well, isn't it obvious?

This guard, a former Roman soldier, who up until this very moment had been either a pagan idolater and polytheist or an atheistic materialist, was asking his prisoners, Paul and Silas, how he might come to be eternally saved and go to live in Heaven with the one true God when he died.

Maybe...

Maybe he had heard the story of the slave girl and how she had announced that these men were the servants of God with the message of salvation.

Undoubtedly, he had heard the singing of Paul and Silas in the prison. So it is possible that he was asking how to receive forgiveness for his sins and how to become a part of the family of the one true God.

But, seeing as how he was one easily escaped prisoner away from a death sentence, this jailer just might have meant something else by his question. Another perfectly legitimate way to understand his question is,

*"Given that I am in a desperate fix now, what must I do to get delivered from my predicament?"<sup>21</sup>*

<sup>18</sup> This experience parallels Peter's. See Acts 5:180-20

<sup>19</sup> In Acts 12, the Lord opened the prison doors for Simon Peter. He did leave, at God's prompting - and the next day Herod had the guards executed. This jailer's fears were completely justified.

<sup>20</sup> Had they been so impressed with the missionaries' singing that they trusted Paul's and Silas instincts to not escape?

<sup>21</sup> The word we translate "saved" often describes a deliverance from any danger.

I think it is possible that this is what he meant, although we can't be sure (and if it is, what a wonderful irony that the jailer is asking the prisoners for a plan for deliverance!).

Regardless as to what he meant, Paul proved again to be the ultimate opportunist and chose to take it as a Gospel question.

*“What must you do to be saved? Why, [Acts 16:31]...Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”*

And the jailer immediately “got it.”

He knew that they were NOT telling him how to get delivered from a terrible jailing problem. After all, Paul's belief in Jesus was what had landed him in jail in the first place! Believing in Jesus obviously didn't guarantee a jail-free life.

He understood that the salvation question Paul was answering had to do with a God-sized problem in the next life, NOT with how to escape a Roman-sized calamity in this life.

And it is very important that you and I understand Paul's answer, noting what is NOT included.

There is no requirement that the jailer clean up his life, get baptized, or do any good works of any kind. There is only one condition for getting saved: TRUSTING RELIANCE ON THE JESUS WHO IS LORD.

On that very night the jailer placed the treasure of his trust in the Lord Jesus! After he trusted Jesus, he shared the message with his household, just as Lydia had done. And they all believed!

*[32] And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. [33] And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.<sup>22</sup>*

And then they - he and his family - were baptized. The baptism gave testimony to the fact that this jailer and his household had all placed their trust in Christ for salvation.

Leaving the place where they had held the baptism (and who knows where THAT place was? In the jail? Just outside the jail?), the jailer brought the two prisoners, Paul and Silas, to his home.

A grateful jailer (vv. 34)

*[34] And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.*

Paul and Silas spent some time with the family going over the Gospel message. They taught them through what portion of the night remained.

And then (and this is the only way I can put the story together) the jailer walked Paul and Silas back to the prison before daybreak.

The end of the chapter shows the final deliverance in the city of Philippi - a deliverance from Philippi.

**Postlude: The Deliverance of Paul and Silas (vv. 35-40)**

**An Offer of (secret) Freedom (vv. 35-36)**

*[35] Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, “Release those men.” [36] And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.”*

The city officials have changed their minds. Why? Had they rethought their position in light of the earthquake? Had they come to realize how unjust their verdict against Paul and Silas had been?

They are, at the least, wanting no more to do with these two guys and hope to escort them silently, maybe through the back door, to keep their release out of the public eye.

<sup>22</sup> This is the second instance of family-wide salvation in the city of Philippi.

Paul has a better idea...

### **Freedom on Their Own Terms (vv. 37-40)**

***[37] But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.”***

Paul’s demand that he and Silas be publicly escorted out of prison may appear to be vindictive. But, actually, it was nothing more than a move to spare the young church in Philippi either an embarrassment or further hassle.

Forcing the officials to deal with Paul and Silas this way would place the believers in a far more secure position in the future.

***[38] The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,*** (because Roman citizens were guaranteed a trial, which Paul and Silas didn’t receive AND were guaranteed to not be beaten with rods, as they had been)

So, the city officials ***[39]...came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. [40] They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.***

### **Conclusion:**

The story of Philippi is the story of Christians opportunists who took advantage of every open door to press Jesus into their world.

- A meeting by the side of a river was an opportunity to share Good News.
- A night in prison was an opportunity to sing hymns of praise to God.
- Open jail doors and broken shackles were opportunities to lovingly stay put and to not put a decent jailer’s life in jeopardy.
- A jailer’s question about getting out of a tough spot was an opportunity to share the Gospel.

What we have seen today is a group of believers who bravely and lovingly turned every situation, not to their own advantage, but to God’s. They turned lemons they were served into delicious lemonade for those around them.

And their story is an invitation to you and me to live just as opportunistically.

Let’s keep our eyes open to the potential each circumstance brings us to press Jesus into our world. When opportunity for the Gospel knocks, by all means - open the door!