



July 19, 2015
Pastor Bill MacDonald
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

On the Move: Liberating Acts 16

We are in the middle of a series from the Book of Acts called *On the Move*. Each week we are looking at how the Holy Spirit is moving in the early church. Last week Pastor Megan talked about how the Spirit was on the move unifying the disciples around one of the key tenets of Christian Faith, which is that we are saved by the grace of God. Some of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem argued that Gentiles also had to be circumcised in order to be saved. However, the apostles and Jerusalem leaders decided that salvation was determined by grace alone through faith in the Lord Jesus.

In Acts 16 we see the Holy Spirit on the move liberating. Paul is on his second missionary journey, this time accompanied by Silas, Timothy and Luke. In a dream Paul sees a vision of a man from Macedonia who begs Paul to come over and help. The team of missionaries journey to Greece and wind up in the Roman colony of Philippi. Paul establishes a church in Philippi in just a few short days. Philippi is later the recipient of one of Paul's most beloved letters in the New Testament.

When Paul arrives in Philippi, he goes down to the river to the place of prayer on the Sabbath. Here he meets a woman named Lydia, a dealer in expensive purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. The Spirit opens her eyes and sets her free to respond to the good news of the gospel. She and her household were baptized and Lydia invites Paul and the team to stay at her home.

On another occasion in Philippi Paul and Silas meet a slave girl who was possessed of a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners through this spirit. The girl followed Paul and the team around shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept saying this over and over, and Paul finally turned to her and said, "In the name of Jesus I command you to come out of her" and at that moment the spirit left her. Once again we witness the Spirit liberating setting a captive free.

This was not good news to the owners of the slave girl. They realized she no longer had this ability to predict the future, so they stirred up a crowd against Paul and Silas who dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, severely flogged and then thrown into the inner cell of the local jail. Here is where I would like to tell you the rest of the story in Acts 16.

I. The Story – Acts 16:25-34

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 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. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself. We are all here!"

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 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 family."

This is the word of the Lord!

Three Observations About How The Spirit Liberates:

1. The Spirit liberates through worship and praise.

In v 25 it says: "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...."

Why were Paul and Silas singing and praying at midnight?

It's most likely that Paul and Silas were experiencing enormous pain and suffering. They had been beaten and flogged with wooden rods earlier in the day at the hands of the authorities. They were locked into the stocks where their ankles and legs were bound. The stocks caused severe cramping, and they probably couldn't sleep.

Despite these horrible conditions the Spirit liberated Paul and Silas to pray and sing hymns to God. What a witness to the other prisoners. Instead of moaning and groaning in agony, instead of cursing their accusers who unjustly punished them, Paul and Silas chose to pray and rejoice in the Lord. What a testing ground for faith: Miserable conditions, physical pain, yet choosing to pray and worship. What a witness!

I imagine this experience formed some of Paul's remarks when he later wrote to the Philippians:

“Finally brothers, whatever is true, what is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:8-9

I have no doubt that some of Paul’s words in the Philippian letter were reflections on his imprisonment at Philippi.

The Spirit liberates through worship; the Spirit also liberates through...

2. The Spirit liberates through hearing the good news.

“....and the prisoners were listening to them... 25

Why were the prisoners listening to Paul and Silas?

Why didn’t they shout out to Paul and Silas “shut up you guys it’s the middle of the night!” ...because Paul and Silas weren’t acting out “in the flesh.” They were responding to their circumstances through the power of the Spirit, praising God through song and word that was captivating. The prisoners were captivated by the message that clearly possessed power in light of their circumstances.

People who don’t believe in God can be captivated by a Jesus’ followers adoration and worship of God. A worship service filled with people genuinely loving God and worshipping Him can have a powerful influence on an unbelieving heart. People are looking for worship that is authentic. We were all created for worship. Our problem is we usually worship the wrong things. Augustine said, “Our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee.” When an unbelieving heart sees genuine, passionate, authentic worship they are won over by God’s Spirit at work in a body. It’s winsome. They hunger to be filled with the reality of God’s presence.

The prisoners were so moved by Paul and Silas’ worship that they didn’t escape and flee when the prison doors flew open! That was liberation! They wanted to hear more about this God of heaven and earth. Literally, the Spirit set the captives free even though they were still in prison!

Some of you may feel like you’re in prison today! You may feel incarcerated in a bad relationship, or in a dead end job, or in a body that is racked with pain or disease, or with a sense of purposelessness. The Spirit can liberate you right now in whatever situation you find yourself in. You might say, “How?”

Look at the example of Paul and Silas. How were Paul and Silas able to overcome their circumstances and possess so much joy after such horrendous treatment?

Do a study sometime in Luke/Acts and look at the connection Luke makes between being filled with the Spirit and being full of joy! In Luke/Acts "joy" is a by-product of being filled with the Spirit. It is the power released in a human soul from being filled with God's glorious presence. That's why we have urged you each week to pray daily to be "filled with the Spirit." His joy is released through the Spirit's fullness in your lives, and that has power! Nehemiah, in the Old Testament, understood the power of joy. He said, "The joy of the Lord is my strength."

That's how you are able to be set free, liberated, even if you're in a dead end job, or a broken body, or aching relationship. God can set you free – through worship, through the word, and thirdly,

The Spirit liberates through worship, the Spirit liberates through the good news; and the Spirit liberates...

3. The Spirit liberates through miracles.

Nothing like a good old fashioned miracle to put the fear of God in a person's heart! That's exactly what happened to the jailer. He felt the earthquake; he saw the prison doors flung open. He knew that this God that Paul preached had something to do with this. And he thought his life was over because these prisoners escaped under his watch. But Paul said, "No. Don't harm yourself. We're all still here!"

So the jailer fell trembling before Paul and Silas and cried out:

"What must I do to be saved?"

Because of the miracle the jailer was ready to hear and receive the good news.

Notice that the jailer's salvation, his deliverance includes repentance. That's a theme in Luke. When people receive God they demonstrate their new life through new behavior.

In the jailer's case, he washed Paul's wounds. He administered aid to Paul and Silas and then he fed them at his dinner table. He changed from being the inflictor of pain to being the healer of pain, from being a man of cruelty and brutality, to being one of compassion and kindness.

Over and over again in the Book of Acts we witness the Holy Spirit liberating people, setting them free to receive the good news of Jesus Christ and releasing them from various forms of captivity.

This morning Randy Bacon is going to share a little bit of how the Spirit brought liberation into his life.

Testimony: Randy Bacon

Hello my name is Randy and I'm a grateful believer in Jesus Christ. I have struggled with compulsive behaviors, depression and anger most of my life. I was raised in a Christian home. I accepted Christ when I was in 7th grade, and I was active in youth group and the church. I was a pretty good kid in high school who followed most of the rules. But I had a secret; I was abused as a child. Little did I know this secret would shape me, I lived in shame.

My world was further rocked when my parents got divorced; I was a junior in high school. This was the tipping point for me, and anger became my primary emotion. My relationship with God and others was strained. In college, I decided that I could do better without God. I stopped attending church altogether and picked up partying, coupled with smoking and heavy drinking.

Fast-forward a few years... I met and married my beautiful wife. We bought a house in Gig Harbor, but all was not perfect. I was still rejecting God and used anger, smoking, alcohol and sometimes pornography to soothe just about any stress or issue I was going through. Six years ago I began to really struggle with depression. I began making even more destructive decisions that brought me to the lowest point I had ever been in my life.

One night after heavy drinking, I hit rock bottom. I had made some decisions that were very detrimental to my marriage which left me alone and separated from my wife and son. A few days later, I realized I had nothing left to lose, I got on my knees, finally turning to God and asking Him to give me grace and help me get my life back together. I started turning to God daily, seeing a counselor for my depression and doing everything I could to clean up my life. I was no longer willing to be controlled by depression. A month later, I found out that Chapel Hill had a Celebrate Recovery program, and I started attending.

Little did I know, I would come to find a home at CR. Initially I attended Celebrate Recovery for my compulsive issues. I found sobriety from alcohol abuse and my struggles with sexual compulsivity. I felt great about the changes and healing God was making in my life, my marriage, and my relationships. My wife even started attending with me.

God has blessed me so much. Before recovery I honestly didn't think I would live past the age of 31. My destructive behavior was a mask for the severe depression that I had struggled with. By the grace of Jesus I am no longer suicidal, and I have lived well past my 31 year old death wish. I am so grateful for life and no longer hate myself!

When I was in college I had told God that I would "never lead worship again". That is the funny thing about telling God your plan. He often says "Oh yeah!"

and then makes you do that very thing. I now lead our CR worship band; God has brought that back into my life as a blessing.

I am also free from the demons that literally would keep me awake at night. After working a step study in CR, I don't have any secrets from my wife, friends or family. I used to have so much shame and guilt when I came to church; now I am free and I don't have any regrets. God's grace has covered every wrong I have done or will do! God has saved me from compulsive worries and trying to show a good face to those around me.

Recovery is a process, and I have been challenged and started to grow in other areas of my life. About three years ago my wife put her foot down and said these cutting words to me "I wish you would take your anger problem as seriously as you do the other issues in your life". These words hurt, and I knew I had to give more to God to be free of this harmful habit of mine.

I started the Men's Freedom from Anger group and started to address my anger. This has been three years of hard work; it has been harder than dealing with depression and quitting smoking. It affected every part of my life and was destroying the relationships and people I loved most.

I am learning how to have healthy relationships with others. Previously my wife and children could not trust me or my responses in everyday life. My anger would cause my wife and me to have horrible and destructive arguments every few months. It has been over 7 months, since we have had one of those fights.

I have made amends with my wife for my hurts to her and for my struggles with anger. I am so grateful for our marriage. We continue to grow together, and I love being married. I praise God for the blessing of my amazing wife!

My relationship with my children has improved immensely also. I can now enjoy the time I have with my kids, and when I make a mistake I can apologize, learn and move on. I look forward to being a godly dad who can tell my kids about the real hurts and risks and how God has worked in my own life.

These are just a few of the many ways that God has completely changed my own life for the better. I know that I am far from perfect, and God is continuing to work on me. CR is one of the tools that helps me to continue to grow. The work I have done isn't easy, but I challenge you to take the next steps. Maybe your marriage is struggling. Maybe you have a habit you can't break. Maybe you can't get over a broken relationship. Healing can be found through Christ and other tools that Chapel Hill offers such as: CR, counseling, marriage seminars, parenting classes, prayer support, etc. I pray that you each find the healing and liberation that Christ can offer. As I often say at

CR... Christ didn't come to give us a new life in eternity. He can give us new life right now, starting today. He can make amazing changes in your life if you are willing to give it to Him and do the work to get there. I am living proof of that!

Application:

What does the Spirit want to liberate you from?

- Unbelief
- Chronic worry, fear
- Addiction
- Control
- Constant need to rescue others, fix them.