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Down by the Riverside

Acts 16:6-40; Philippians 1:1

SCRIPTURE TO MEMORIZE

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

WALKING WITH THE LORD

Sunday	Acts 9:1-9	Thursday	Acts 13:1-4
Monday	Acts 9:10-19	Friday	Romans 1:8-16
Tuesday	Acts 9:20-31	Saturday	I Corinthians 15:1-11
Wednesday	Galatians 1:15-24		

LESSON OVERVIEW

Accompanied by Luke, Timothy, and Silas, Paul visited Philippi during his second missionary journey. He had planned to evangelize Asia, but God planned for him to preach in Europe, where Philippi was a principal city and a Roman colony. From a humble beginning, with adversity swirling around Paul and his missionary team, a great dynamic church sprang to life. Philippians is addressed to the church at Philippi about ten years after its founding. It expresses Paul’s deep joy and abounding thanksgiving for its testimony and fellowship.

LIFE AWARENESS

God does not demand brilliance on the part of His people, but He does require obedience. Paul was a brilliant scholar, but he didn’t respond positively to the Macedonian call because he was brilliant. Reason would have led him to pursue an eastward course to Asia, but his devotion to God’s will prompted him to sail westward to Macedonia. In time, significant spiritual fruit grew from the seeds of Paul’s obedience.

The Christian life progresses one step at a time. None of us can see what lies ahead—tomorrow, next week, next year, or ten years

from now. We must obey God today and place the future in His hands. If we obey, today will be blessed and the future will be bright.

HOW THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH BEGAN

(Acts 16:6-40)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had preached in Phrygia and Galatia. When they tried to enter Asia, the Holy Spirit prohibited them from doing so. Eventually, they arrived at Troas, a seaport on the northwestern coast of Asia Minor (vv. 6-8). There, Paul received a revelation that changed not only the course of his travels but also the course of history.

The revelation reached Paul in the form of a vision in which a man of Macedonia urged, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (v. 9). Obedient to God's summons, Paul and his team immediately packed their bags and sailed across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. They landed at Neapolis and traveled ten miles inland to Macedonia's chief city, Philippi (vv. 10-12).

1. How did Paul's journey west to Europe, instead of east to Asia, affect world history?
2. Why is it best to follow God's plans instead of our own?
3. How can churches respond better to the needs of missionary appointees?

God often works in mysterious ways. Paul may have expected that the man in the vision would be the first convert in Europe. However, the first convert was a woman named Lydia, who had moved to Philippi from Thyatira. As a seller of purple cloth in Philippi, she must have been a successful businesswoman. Philippians wanted to wear what the influential Romans wore. However, owning a successful business had not satisfied Lydia's spiritual hunger. Her quest to know God took her to a quiet place by Philippi's river. There, with other women, she prayed and worshiped God (vv. 13-14a).

Paul and his team would have visited a synagogue on the Sabbath, but Philippi did not have one. So they went to Lydia's riverside prayer meeting. Paul shared the Gospel of Christ, the Messiah, and Lydia embraced the message. The Lord had opened her heart (v. 14b)! Promptly, Lydia and her household were baptized upon confession of their faith in Christ (v. 15a). Then she invited the missionaries to stay in her home. The Lord had opened

her heart, and now Lydia was opening her home to those who had introduced her to Christ.

1. What kinds of actions or questions might indicate that the Lord is opening a person's heart to receive Christ?
2. What circumstances did the Lord use to prepare your heart for the Gospel?
3. Lydia opened her home to Paul and his missionary team. Do you believe Christian hospitality is alive and well today? How can Christians become more hospitable?

Almost as soon as God had begun a good work at Philippi, the devil initiated an evil work. This scenario of evil versus good dates back to the Garden of Eden, and it will continue until Jesus Christ casts the devil into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:7-10). The devil is no match for God, of course, but his battles against God and His people are fierce and vicious. At Philippi, opposition from the devil erupted first at the hands of a demonic, fortune-telling slave girl. Day after day she followed Paul and his companions, screaming that they were servants of the Most High God and that they were showing the way of salvation (vv. 16-17). Grieved by the girl's behavior, Paul commanded the demon to leave her (v. 18). The demon's departure signaled the end of the girl's fortune-telling and the end of her owners' prosperity. Feeling a sharp pain in their pocketbook, the slave girl's owners pounced on Paul and Silas and dragged them to the city's square to appear before the judges (v. 19), saying they were Jews trying to teach unlawful customs because the Philippians were Romans (vv. 20-21).

Prodded by an enraged mob, the judges ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten and thrown into prison (vv. 22-23). They charged the jailer to keep them secure. He consigned Paul and Silas to the inner prison and cuffed their feet, making conditions as hopeless as possible for them (v. 24). However, Paul and Silas didn't lose hope, nor did they lose true freedom. At midnight, they celebrated the hope and freedom that Christ had given to them. They prayed and sang praises to God, and their strong voices carried throughout the prison (v. 25).

1. What forms of opposition are Christians most likely to encounter in our nation?

Do you believe persecution will intensify? Why or why not?

2. Why do you suppose the authorities exempted Luke and Timothy from the harsh treatment that Paul and Silas received? (Hint: see verse 20.)

Not only did all the prisoners hear Paul and Silas, God also heard them—and responded with an earthquake that rocked the prison. Cell doors flew open, and chains fell away from the captives (v. 26). Awaking, the jailer found the prison doors open. Assuming the prisoners had fled and that he would be severely punished for letting them escape, he prepared to commit suicide by falling on his sword (v. 27). Only Paul’s loud cry that all the inmates were present kept the jailer from taking his life (v. 28).

Awestruck by what had occurred, the trembling jailer fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out of their cell and asked them what he must do to be saved (vv. 29-30). Their answer was immediate, and simple: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (v. 31).

The jailer and his household responded to this word by believing (vv. 32-33). The jailer quickly acted as a transformed sinner; he bathed Paul’s and Silas’s wounds (v. 33a). Then he and his household obeyed the Lord in baptism (v. 33b). Next, he ushered them into his home and served them a hearty meal (v. 34).

The following day, the judges ordered Paul and Silas’s release, but Paul pointed out that the beating and imprisonment had violated his and Silas’s liberty as Roman citizens. He demanded that the judges come to the prison and release them (v. 37). He may have felt that this action would send a message to the authorities—they should not discriminate against any more Christians. The judges met Paul’s demand and then begged him and his team to leave Philippi (v. 39). After encouraging their fellow believers in Lydia’s home, the missionaries departed (v. 40).

1. Paul and Silas prayed and praised in what appeared to be desperate circumstances. How does their example help you?

2. After witnessing God’s power in the midst of adversity, Paul and Silas encouraged others. What have you learned in adversity that you can use to encourage others?

WHAT THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH BECAME

(Philippians 1:1)

Within 10 years of the founding of the church at Philippi, it had become a dynamic, missionary-minded fellowship. In Philippians 1:1, Paul greeted the church as a fellowship of “saints” with “bishops and deacons.” As saints, they were set apart “in Christ Jesus,” and their lives reflected Christlikeness. Their neighbors patterned their lives after the Romans, but they patterned their lives after Christ. Their citizenship was in heaven, and their mission was to spread the Gospel of Christ.

The bishops demonstrated pastoral leadership, and the deacons assisted them. Together, under the guidance of the Chief Shepherd, they would help the believers accomplish God’s will.

1. How does wise spiritual leadership benefit a church?
2. How can you serve others in their spiritual development?

BIBLE AND LIFE APPLICATION

We must not measure a church’s greatness by the size of its budget or by the expanse of its buildings. A church’s greatness is determined by its love for the Lord, for His Word, for one another, and for the lost. Measured by these standards, the Philippian church was a great church. The best contribution you can make to your church is to be a loving, loyal follower of Jesus Christ.

MY RESPONSE TO GOD

CLASS PRAYER NEEDS
