

How God Began the Good Work

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[0 : 0 0] This time we turn our attention to God's word and so I invite you to open up your Bibles with me to Acts chapter 16. Acts chapter 16. I am aware that you are busy working through the book of Acts and I informed Stephen that I'm hoping to preach Acts chapter 16.

He assured me it's okay. He's not there yet, but when he gets there, he'll be able to clean up where needed. So this morning I have the permission not to mess up, but to preach from Acts chapter 16 and Stephen will come and go over this when he gets here.

Well, Acts chapter 16 and we'll read from verse 11 all the way through to verse 34. Acts chapter 16 verse 11 through to verse 34.

Hear the word of the Lord. So setting sail from Traus, we made a direct voyage to Sumatras and the following day to Neapolis. And from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

We remained in the city some days and on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside where we supposed there was a place of prayer.

[1 : 0 9] And we sat down and spoke to the woman who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Tythera, a seller of purple goods who was a worshiper of God.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she had been baptized and her household as well, she urged us saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.

And she prevailed upon us. As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune telling.

She followed Paul and us crying out, These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

And it came out of her that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

[2 : 2 0] And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. When they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.

Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.

[3 : 31] And the jailer called for lights, and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved, you and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds.

And he was baptized at once, he and his family. Then he brought them up to his house, and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household, that he had believed in God.

And this is the word of the Lord. Praise the Lord. Let's pray and ask God's blessing on our time in the scriptures. Our Father, we thank you for your word open before us. We do pray now your blessing on the preaching of your word.

We ask that you would give us insight, O Lord. And with the psalmist, we ask that you would help us to see wonderful things in your word. So open our eyes now, Lord, and grant us insight. These mercies we do pray and ask in Jesus' name.

[4 : 35] Amen. Amen. I'm busy at the church where I serve, preaching through the book of Philippians. Now, there are many popular verses that spring from the book of Philippians.

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, right? Philippians chapter 1, verse 21. We have Philippians chapter 4, verse 19. My God shall supply all my needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

We have that very terse, and to the point verse, Philippians 4, verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord. And again, I say rejoice. And then, of course, we have the Christ hymn, the passage about the humility, the humiliation, the condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ in Philippians chapter 2.

But one of the standout verses to me in Philippians chapter, or in the book of Philippians, comes from Philippians chapter 1, where the apostle speaks about, he who began the good work in you.

He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion, says the apostle Paul. He speaks to the church in Philippi, and he reminds them that God had begun a good work in them, and he will bring it to completion.

[5 : 47] Now, this morning, we've read Acts chapter 16, and this is the scene of the crime, as it were. This is the place where God began a good work in the church in Philippi.

This is the reference to which the apostle Paul is speaking of when he says, he who began a good work in you. Where do we read about this good work?

We read about this good work in Acts chapter 16, in Paul's time in Philippi. And so, here we have a passage of scripture that we've lifted up out of Philippians chapter 1, and this verse is actually one of the most comforting verses concerning the assurance of our salvation.

The doctrine of assurance is what we see in this verse, he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. And so, the assurance, the biblical doctrine of our assurance, teaches us that we will make it.

We will get there. We are not there yet, but we will get there. We are not there yet, but God will complete the work in us. Amidst the doubt, the struggle, anxiety, and the fear, the truth that he who began a good work in you and will bring it to completion sounds off and overturns doubt into fear, into faith, struggle, into joy, anxiety, into peace, and fear, into hope.

[7 : 15] And one of the ways to be comforted by the doctrine of assurance is found in Philippians chapter 1, verse 1. And so, we come back to Acts chapter 16, where it all unfolded, where it all happened, where it began, where the Lord started this good work in the believers in Philippi.

Now, as we look at this passage that we've just read now, Acts chapter 16, from verse 11 through to 34, we see three different accounts of conversion.

We see how the Lord brought to faith three different kinds of people. And these, we would like to think, became the early believers, the early members of the church in Philippi. We have, for example, Lydia, a God-fearing businesswoman whose heart was open.

We have the slave girl, a demon-possessed girl who was delivered. And then we've got the Roman jailer, a hopeless prison guard who was saved.

These three main conversion accounts show us how God began the work in them. And this is how God begins His work in us. Opening hearts of stone, delivering from the power of Satan, and saving from hopelessness and despair.

[8 : 31] From these three accounts, how should we understand the good work the Lord begins? Well, I just want to quickly, through three points, guide us and walk us through how to understand this good work that the Lord begins in us.

Firstly, the work of God is a work in our hearts. And we see it here in Acts chapter 16, verse 11 through to 15. We see the beginning of God's good work in them starts with a God-fearing businesswoman named Lydia.

Now, Paul had arrived in Philippi, and as is his custom to attend a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath, where he would typically reason with them and show them that Jesus is the Christ.

He is the Messiah. But we notice that here, instead of that, Paul goes to a place called a place of prayers. Now, what this most likely tells us is that there were no synagogues in Philippi at the time.

It required ten Jewish men, heads of houses, to form a synagogue, and it appeared as if this quorum was not sufficiently met in Philippi, and so instead, there was a large prayer gathering on the Sabbath.

[9 : 48] Nonetheless, Paul is there. He finds himself among this group of Jews, who is among this prayer gathering, largely made up of women. He finds this group of women, and one of whom is named Lydia.

Listening intently to what Paul is saying, the Bible says Lydia was. She's called a worshiper of God. Now, this is somewhat of a technical term to speak of a Gentile who came to believe on the God of Israel.

So this woman was a convert, we could say, to Judaism, a follower of the God of Israel, an observer of the Old Testament law, religious, God-fearing.

Furthermore, we are told that she was a seller of purple goods, of purple fabrics. She was a businesswoman. This was a religious, morally conscious, hard-working woman, finding herself on the Sabbath, praying.

God began a good work in her. We read that as she was listening to Paul, the Lord opened her heart. The Lord opened her heart because even religiously observant people, morally conscious people, respected and hard-working people, stand in need of the gospel of grace.

[11 : 06] Though she wasn't closed off to God entirely, she probably observed the law, practiced the faith, but she was closed off to the Christ. And until we are open to Christ, it doesn't matter how open to God we think we are, our hearts are actually still closed.

It is only Christ who opens our hearts. It is Christ in us that is evidence of our hearts being open. But notice what the Lord does for Lydia. He does something for her that she could not do for herself.

He does something for her that she through many good things could not obtain. He does something for her that she though having much good in her life still lacked.

God opened her heart. The Lord opened her heart. To what? We are told to hear what the Apostle Paul had said, was saying.

What was Paul saying? Well, Paul was speaking of the message of Christ, the gospel itself. Here we learn the lesson that when the gospel is proclaimed, it is God's work to open hearts.

[12 : 12] It's God's work to open our hearts, to heed the message, to pay attention to it. Men and women are naturally closed to the gospel, closed to God. While they open their hearts to many good things in their lives, they need God to open their hearts to Him.

And as we are seated here this morning, we reflect on our reality, that we received God's word, we love the gospel, we heed what is being said to us, and it is evidence that God had opened our hearts.

And so when Paul writes to them a time later in his letter, the epistle to the Philippians, he speaks about He who began a good work in you. And this is the good work God begins, by opening hearts.

Yes, Lydia has lots of outward features that were commendable. And you may be here this morning, there may be lots of outward, external features that are commendable.

But when God begins the work, He begins the work in our hearts. When God begins the work, He opens up our hearts. The external is insufficient. The outward can appear superficial.

[13 : 23] The form of godliness must also be sustained by the heart of godliness. I'm reminded of Samuel who was sent to anoint the new king of Israel.

And as he went to Jesse, and as he scanned and surveyed Jesse's sons, Samuel says, surely this one, Eliab, surely he's the one. He's tall, he's good looking, he's got all the external qualities to be a king.

And God says, no, God does not look on the outward appearance. He looks at the heart. And He opens up our heart to His word when He begins His work in us.

And so we learn then, how did God begin this good work among the church in Philippi? He began it by opening up hearts. Number two, and the second point that I want to raise is, the work of God is a work against Satan.

And so we learn the work of God begins as a work in the heart. And then, the second conversion account, and it's almost totally different from the first conversion account.

[14 : 25] In the first instance, we had a religious woman whose heart got open. Now in the second account, we encounter a demon-possessed slave girl. We read, for instance, in verse 16, as we were going to the place of prayer, and so again, Paul retreats back and visits again this place of prayer, and it is at this place of prayer where we can say it's ground zero for the church in Philippi.

And he goes there again, verse 16, as we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

So here, in the first instance, we had this respectable businesswoman who was in need of God, and now we have this demon-possessed slave girl. Demon-possessed slave girl that Paul encountered.

The girl was owned as a fortune-telling slave. She had a demon in her who enabled this ability. Her fourth telling of who Paul was and what he was doing greatly annoyed Paul, the Bible says.

Sometimes we are not sufficiently annoyed by the provocations of Satan. Paul is greatly annoyed by this slave girl. Paul did not want demons to draw attention to him.

[15 : 49] Paul did not want to be associated with demons. Paul was not seeking the help of demons, but the destruction of these evil forces. Paul would not be happy with the demons' proclamation while they were destroying the girl's soul.

We see here how the Lord worked towards this girl, was different to how the Lord worked toward Lydia. The same power, the same God, the same grace, but worked differently toward different people.

God's grace meets us differently depending upon where we find ourselves in our lives. Lydia was sympathetic towards God. She was close to the kingdom, one might say, and God brought her in.

The slave girl, however, is totally immersed into another kingdom. She's completely drawn from the light. She's walking not only in darkness, but with darkness. This shows that God's work is a work towards the whosoever.

What did these two women have in common? Not much, really, except that they both needed a work of God. And here we see Paul empowered and inspired by God, exercising the demon and delivering this girl.

[17 : 05] And this is how God began his work in the church of Philippi. He opened their hearts and he delivered them from Satan. This is somewhat the blueprint of the gospel's work, of God's work in us.

He does, and how does he begin his work in us? He begins it in us by opening hearts and delivering us from Satan's destruction. This is what the Bible teaches us, that man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

Jesus thought that from the heart comes all sorts of iniquity. The prophet Ezekiel says that God will remove the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh. And we see in Lydia, it is a work of God to give us this heart of stone, this heart of flesh, to bring the gospel into our hearts.

But we are not unaffected by Satan, brothers and sisters. We are not unaffected by his agents. Our disobedience, though completely ours, is aided by Satan and encouraged by his agents of darkness.

This is why the Bible says that those who walk according to the course of this world are following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work, the Bible calls those who are unbelievers sons of disobedience.

[18 : 24] Unbelievers may not have demonic activity as the slave girl had, but what they, but what you must remember is every act of sin and disobedience shows the effects and the power of Satan in our lives.

But praise God that his work in us is to deliver us from the power of Satan. That's why with a word Paul commands this demon and he's gone. I'm drawn back to the hymn of Charles Wesley, right, And Can It Be, where he writes, Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's light.

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray. I awoke the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off. My heart was free. I arose, went forth and followed thee.

We see her owners were unhappy and angry that their gravy train had now stopped. That the money had now stopped. That the demon has now been delivered and she can no longer tell the future or give her fortune telling and so there's no more income to be made off of her.

So they're unable to profit with this poor girl's oppression. What strikes me here is the two different kinds of demonic activity. Demonic activity through the verbal utterances of internal possession in the slave girl but then also don't miss the demonic activity through human exploitation.

[19 : 53] We see here external oppression where these owners of the slave girl were exploiting her and we see the influence of Satan. we see them being sons and daughters of disobedience following the course of the prince of the power of the air.

And Paul and Silas are then dragged before the magistrates and accused of disturbing the city we are told. Sinful men look at the work of God and consider it a disturbance, a distraction, an inconvenience to their sin.

Praise the Lord for divine disturbances. This is in fact the work of God to disturb us in our sin, to deliver us from our evil. Paul and Silas are then attacked.

We read in verse 22 and in verse 23 they are punished. And here's an interesting lesson for those who may be enamored by the power of God.

For those who see Paul commanding demons and wanting to operate in such displays. here's a lesson. With divine power may come earthly persecution.

[21 : 04] Paul was not too great a man for him not to be beaten, for him not to be attacked, imprisoned like a nothing. And receiving great enablement from God does not secure one against great suffering for God.

And so we see the deliverance of the slave girl. We see the opening of Lydia's heart. And then we come to the third and final conversion account and the person that rounds off this church plant here in Philippi, the Philippian jailer.

And we read of him in Acts chapter 16 verse 25 to verse 40. This is how God built his church in Philippi. And when Paul says you began a good work in you, this is the work that God did.

And so we read that Paul and Silas were given over to the jailer. he was ordered to keep them safely. And having received his order, he proceeded to do just that.

The pressure, the responsibility, the weight that rested on the Roman soldier, upon the Roman jailer. He understood the consequence of failure and he carried out his task with great care.

[22 : 20] Jailing Paul and Silas now tells us something of this man's life. He was sold out to the cause. He was sold out to the cause.

He was given to this life, acting out his orders without flinch or hesitation. He was an operative of the state and fiercely so.

this wasn't Lydia, friends, a person close to the kingdom. This wasn't a slave girl involuntarily uttering demonic inspired words.

This was a rough, barbaric, strong, tough, cold-hearted man in his own person given wholly and willfully over to the Roman empire. I set him up like this so we can understand how God removed the heart of stone and gave him a heart of flesh.

I want us to see this man for who he was so we can appreciate what God did in his life. One who was cold-hearted, merciless, receiving his orders and without flinch and hesitation following these orders without respect to Paul or Silas and who they were.

[23 : 34] Friends here this morning understand in the words of the chorus writer Jesus' blood can make the vilest sinner clean and this is what we see in the life of this Roman jailer.

Lydia who was respectable and close to the kingdom the gospel will bring her in. The slave girl was possessed by demonic agents the gospel will set her free and break the chains of darkness and even in a godless cold-hearted man without any religious inclination in his bone the gospel will quicken make alive and reconcile him to his creator.

Now just very quickly note we read Paul and Silas verse 25 about midnight they found themselves praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them so they've been chained up in prison suffering in pain because of the beatings that they've received and we note here very quickly that while Paul and Silas are in chains in pain and in prison we see that even in this predicament they were praying and singing hymns to God.

You know there's something about the honor of participating in gospel work that does not compare to the dishonor that we may sometimes have to suffer.

That the dishonor we may suffer as a result of gospel work does not compare to the honor that we have in participating in this great work.

[25 : 16] I hesitate to even bring this up but I tend to follow foreign affairs quite closely and what's happening in the world internationally and even in the US got a few American people in our church and we always talk in politics but outside of church and Bible studies and in any other religious observant event because these things can get a bit as you know intense and I hesitate to even bring this up especially from the pulpit with all the polarizing things happening in the US but there's this saying that it gets repeated and brought up at election time in the US and it goes like this you can't only love your country when you win there's a sign and I think that translates into what we see here with Paul you can't only love your God when you win but Paul and Silas are in prison Paul and Silas are in pain Paul and Silas are in suffering Paul and Silas are here for the gospel and what do we find them doing we find them singing praising God we cannot only praise

God when life is good we cannot only love God when we are winning when we are without trouble we cannot only pray when we receive a favorable answer Paul and Silas are in prison but also in praise they are in deep pain but also in earnest prayer and notice others were hearing and so how you praise God in your pain and trouble can be a great witness to those around you Paul and Silas praised God when he opened up Lydia's heart they praised God when he delivered the slave girl and even now they praise God when they find themselves chained up and in prison but now back to the Roman jailer he received his orders and secured the prisoners fastened their feet locked them up and sealed the prison doors all the calculations to ensure they are kept safely in jail have been followed but he never accounted for God he never accounted for God and all man's efforts in plotting evil as believers we trust in the strong arm of God an earthquake we read happened and everyone's bonds were unfastened the jailer woke and when he saw the prison doors were open he drew his sword to take his own life thinking the prisoners had escaped understanding the consequences of what this will mean for him notice the great mercy of God contrasted with the despairing yoke of idols this man was completely given to the

Roman Empire worshipping the emperor and sold out to the cause but he understood what one failure would mean he understood one failure would mean his end and then we see contrasting to this after imprisoning God's servants fastening their feet and locking them up God still shows mercy and grace friends this world is a nasty master this world is an ugly lord this is what Jesus said come unto me and I will give you rest my yoke is easy and my burden is light so God began the work in them opening up Lydia's heart he began the work in them and the slave girl is deliverance from Satan and here we see God begins the good work in them by rescuing this soldier from a cruel master you may relate to one of these people you may wonder in light of all of this how can I be saved well this is the same question the jailer asked notice verse 30 then he brought them out and said sirs what must I do to be saved and they said believe on the Lord

Jesus and you'll be saved and your household notice after each one of these works of God there is evidence of faith so how can I be saved believe on the Lord Jesus Christ believe on the Lord Jesus Christ place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ trust in him that's how we are saved trust in who he is and trust in what he has done and we notice after each of these works of God there is evidence the Lord opened Lydia's heart and she responded and opened her home the Lord delivered the slave girl and at once she was freed and the exploitation stopped and the Lord saved the jailer and he began to care for Paul and Silas what a change in treatment he gave them all because of the change that God had worked in him and so Paul writes to them a few years later he who began a good work in you is able to bring it to completion and as we survey the good work that the Lord had done in them it gives all the more confidence and assurance that he will complete it so as we conclude these three no doubt became part of the church of Philippi we've looked at the work

God had begun in them and I want to assure you this morning that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion as a church and as we reflect on God's good work may the reality of what he has done in us by opening our hearts by delivering us from Satan and by saving us from despair and hopelessness may this ground our assurance that just as he began this work in us he will indeed complete it he will complete it at the day of Jesus Christ let's pray until it by he pray by Lord then ■■■■ will boundary du and pour set and through the day of

[31 : 30] He