

## Meeting the Enemy Acts 16:16-18

As we come to our text we find that Paul and the rest of the missionaries are in Philippi and it seems they are there to stay for a while and hopefully to really see the gospel take hold and establish a church for the glory of Christ. And it is incredible the amount of opposition against Christianity and the Christian message right from the beginning. And it comes in so many forms, from the religious Jews to idolaters to those who are just happy in their sin, but the opposition does come. And here we see that one of Satan's emissaries is employed to thwart the efforts of the missionaries.

And we realize that the unseen world is real, and there are real forces and spirits that work against us as believers and our faith in Christ. Listen to Ephesians 6:12, "**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**" We have the accuser of the brethren who is a roaring lion, who seeks to somehow snuff out any faith or reliance in Jesus Christ. We not only have the world to battle that is continually assaulting believers, and our own flesh that is prone to wander and leave the God we love, we have the Satan and his minions that are employed to upset our faith and our trust in Christ. And he has many tools in his toolbox to try and disturb you and me in some way and some how.

Now when it comes to Satan and demons we usually have a couple of different responses. One is to see them behind every single bush and every problem. There are many employed in what is called modern spiritual warfare, and they are continually trying to win back ground from the devil. They see the greatest problem that each individual has is not so much a spiritual problem or indwelling sin or heart problem that we are culpable of, but that they have a spirit problem. There are spirits that cause them to do what they would not normally do. They are not culpable. And therefore they are involved in spirit exorcisms. And it is amazing that we are never commanded to fight Satan or demons through casting them out but we fight Satan through drawing near to God in faith and trust. Listen to James 4:7-8, "**Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**" Notice we are to submit and draw near to God. Notice we are to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. We fight Satan through repentance and faith in Christ. The spiritual warfare movement has taken off in our Christianity today and there is very little trust in Christ but a lot of fear, and it becomes more akin to magical spells or whatever. We are not called to a cast out ministry but a drawing near ministry to God.

But we can also be over on the other side of the equation where we live in a modern and materialistic world where the spirit world does not exist. We can believe in God but we act as if there is no other realm. And here is the glory of Christianity is there is no one greater than Christ. There is none more sovereign than our great God, and greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. And Satan has been alive and well these last two thousand years of church history. In fact he used to be so involved in each of our lives. We read in Ephesians 2:1-2, "**And you were dead in the**

**trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.**” Who did we voluntarily and willfully follow? None other than the prince of the power of the air. Listen to 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, **“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”** Who blinds people so that they will not see the gospel? Who blinded us so that we will not see the glory of Christ? None other than the god of this world. Satan was very active in our lives. And again, we have no one else to blame but ourselves because we were willing followers in one way or another.

And here is the incredible thing I want us to see this morning: we all have obstacles and trials and difficulties in our lives. You are going through them right here and right now. It might be suffering through a faulty aging body, it could be relationship turmoil where the pain is so sharp and constant, it could be some temptation in your life that leads you down a path where it seems so inevitable that you will fall into sin and there is nothing you can do. But here is the good news, our God is greater than any the obstacles you are facing this very day. Listen to 2 Peter 1:3, **“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”** It is a lie of Satan himself, who is the father of lies that you do not have everything you need. God’s divine power has provided the necessary grace for the battle at hand. Here is the question in whatever you are facing today — do you believe he is more than enough in all your trials and struggles — more than enough in your marriage, more than enough in your battle with lust, more than enough with your aging body? God wants us to truly see that his grace is absolutely sufficient for all of life and for you to truly live a godly life. So let’s look at this passage and see a couple things.

1. We need to see the opposition. Vv. 16-17.

One of the things that is amazing about life, and absolutely fascinating is all the twists and turns. Some of them are so beneficial in our lives, and some just shock us. Sometimes it is people who might turn against us, or a relationship we thought was solid not be so, or a job that suddenly shuts down, or the doctor visit that we just thought was routine, or the rebellion in a child that we never saw coming, or a temptation that reared its head that we thought we had conquered. Often we are confused and bewildered but the midst of all of this God’s word and God’s will has not changed. His calling us to trust and follow him, and be his representatives. And whatever you are going through this morning, do you recognize his calling to draw close to him, represent him, trust him and make much of him?

Because this opposition and trial of Paul and the missionaries seems to come out of nowhere, **“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.”** As they were going to the place of prayer, in other words, this would have been the next Sabbath, and they are going to the place of worship, maybe down by the river. But here we see they are met with a slave girl, who has the spirit of divination.

And the wording in the Greek is basically “pythos” for “spirit of divination.” The word refers to the activities at the oracle of Delphi, where the oracle was said to be guarded by an enormous python in which Zeus came and killed, and he inhabited the serpent in the form of individuals who were give information about the future. And these oracles were sought after and very lucrative for the so-called priests of these oracles because they could tell the future. Commanders and kings and rulers would go to them before going into battles to see if they should go into war. Now the message would be very vague to always give the oracle a way out. One such was a king went, and the oracles said, “If you go to war there will be a great victory,” so the king went to war but lost the battle. He came back, but the oracle explained, we did not say who would have the great victory. Still, individuals put in a lot of stock into the messages they gave.

But here there is a specific message and is pretty accurate. Look at verse 17, **“She followed Paul and us, crying out, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.’”** Now you have to know that this young slave girl would have a large following around her along with her owners. And people would wait until the spirit would speak through her and they would be amazed or in awe. Here it is a message about Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, and that they were slaves, or bond servants of the Most High God. They proclaim to you the way of salvation. Are they servants of the Most High God, and the answer is yes. And they are in contrast to her slavery in that we are slaves of Christ delightfully seek to do his will, and have been given the freedom over sin to truly follow him. Christ’s yoke is easy and is not burdensome compared to our old slavery in sin. And we do announce the way of salvation and freedom through Christ. Through repentant faith in Christ you can have your sins forgive and be saved from the wrath of God and the ability to follow him.

So what is wrong with this message? And there are a couple of things. One is the source. It is none other than a Satanic inspired message. And we might say how can it be from Satan? And it is not difficult. It is because this message right in the passage is not from God but this spirit of divination. And here is the thing you have to understand about Satan — he will give a hundred truths in order to give one lie. Here is a lie one of you heard just recently, since Jesus paid for your sins, than your sins do not matter. It really is not that big of a deal. And we realize that we have been justified by faith alone in Christ alone. Our salvation is not based on anything we do or say. And there is a sense where there is truth in that statement. In fact, in Romans Paul knows that some will make that false conclusion if they understand the doctrine of justification. Listen to what he says in Romans 6:1-2, **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”** That is what this preacher was teaching. Your sin is no big deal. Don’t be bothered by it. If we use the Nike saying, just do it. But listen to what Paul says in verse 2, **“By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”** Through Christ we have died to sin. What this means is God delivers us from the penalty of sin but he is also delivering from the control of sin. Something that cost Jesus his life that we might be set free, it becomes unthinkable to continue in it. Sin is a big deal. Jesus has become altogether desirable and lovely.

But here is my point. There is truth here in what she says. Listen to how Paul describes these emissaries of Satan in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.**

**And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.**” Satan will present truth even bold truth many times with the whole goal of telling lies to deceive others, and lead them away from Christ. And so you have to realize the source, and if Satan is the source he is not seeking to get others to follow Christ. Saying sin is no big deal is a satanic ally inspired lie.

The other thing that is wrong about this message is because it is not said by the representatives of God — by the servants of God, it is misunderstood by the audience in which is hearing it. When these messages came to the soothsayer, the person would speak from the belly and there would be convulsions, and the message would come. Think about it because in the eyes of her listeners she was a messenger of Zeus, and being a messenger of Zeus, even though she used accurate language — these are servants of the most high God — they would have understood it in a different way. They would have understood these were messengers from Zeus, or this most high God is connected to Zeus. Also, the message of salvation, because it is given through this spirit of divination that is recognized part of the polytheistic system of Greek and Roman gods than it is just one way of salvation in a sea of many different options. It is the popular sentiment today that there is only one heaven but many roads that lead to the same destination.

So Satan’s emissaries began on the outside of Christianity but sought to come inside of Christianity. Here is the incredible thing, the perversion of the blessed gospel message begins on the inside and seeks to direct hearts and lives away from the Jesus of our salvation and the glory of God. Think one of the most popular messages today. Jesus suffered so you don’t have to. There is truth there. He took the wrath that I deserve because of my sin. But there is falsehood. They mean if you trust Christ you will have all the health and wealth you ever dreamed of. It is a different gospel and salvation. It is a lie from Satan himself. We are promised trials. Paul when revisiting many of the churches he planted taught in Acts 14:22, **“strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”** There it is. Our ultimate reward and rest and deliverance is not here. We look for the day we will be with our Lord either through death or his coming. But Satan and his representatives seek to subvert the truth. Your heaven and hope is here.

But here is the glory. God has delivered us from the realm of darkness. God has shone the truth of the gospel of Christ right into our hearts and we believe. And now he calls us even in the face of opposition and trial to be his witnesses regardless of the trials we are facing today. Paul and the others didn’t look for this opposition, but here is the truth — they are called to be his representatives in the midst of that opposition. We never know the true origin of the opposition — is it the world, or people blinded by sin, or Satan himself? But we never have to know, because his will in all our adversities has not changed and that is to be his light. Are we seeking to be his light?

2. We see action is taken. V.18.

I am amazed at how much demonic activity you see throughout the Bible even though Satan and demons are hardly mentioned, and yet it is only in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles that you see demons cast out. You never see it in Old Testament Israel even though all the nations were consumed with idolatry and witchcraft and various incantations that were all demonic in nature. Yet there is never this casting out. Certainly, like all miracles, these were self-authenticating signs that spoke of the authority of the message proclaimed. Jesus is Lord of creation, he can walk on water, Lord of the dead — he can raise Lazarus, and Lord of the Spirit world — he can cast out demons and they have to listen to him. But we as believers have something even more powerful than signs and that is the gospel of Christ. We come with as Ephesians says the armour of God which is all related to the truth of the glorious gospel. We preach Christ who is able to deliver any and all who truly repent from the clutches of Satan. And God's power is able to make us witnesses no matter what the opposition we face in this life.

So look at verse 18 and think through what is happening here, **“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 that very hour.”** We realize that she kept doing this for many days. And you can imagine trying to preach or have conversations with others only to have this slave girl cry out in a trance, and have people distracted. And this happened over and over. Paul became annoyed. And that annoyance might have been that her masters were profiting off her. They were gaining more attention, and maybe even others were asking questions of her of their own lives, fortune telling as the passage says. And of course this was all for profit. And maybe Paul was not just annoyed at the interruptions but the bondage of this girl and the uncaring and carnal attitude of her masters. It could be that he was annoyed because she was diluting and changing the emphasis of the message. Jesus truly is the only way of salvation.

He turns to her, and casts out the demon not through his own authority but through the authority of Christ, and the demon that brought so much pain and suffering in her life has to come out. Now here is the question, why didn't he cast out the demon sooner! And there is nothing in the text that really indicates why he didn't. One reason might be that he knew that Jews in general were hated in Philippi, and if he caused any financial loss to anyone that it would end in such severe opposition that it wouldn't allow any opportunity to really continue in preaching the gospel in Philippi. That is one reason, the other is every single person's biggest problem is their wilful sin before a holy God. And the reason why I say wilful is we are responsible. We cannot blame others, or circumstances, or being tired, or even Satan himself. We are responsible. And maybe as Paul preaches the gospel it is out of compassion — she needs to repent and trust Christ. She is a wilful instrument in the hand of Satan. When it becomes obvious that repentance is not coming, and the disturbance is becoming greater he casts out the demon and her ability of divination is gone.

Now whether she came to Christ or not we are not told in this passage, but the narrative focuses on the owners of this slave girl. And know she would have really suffered and here is deliverance. And yet there is no joy or rejoicing but anger and hostility that will become violent. Amazing isn't it? Here is a clear sign of the gospel power. For those who think that all we need is miracles today to convince people of the

gospel have not read their Bibles. People are hardened in their sin, and lovers of their sin, and here in the most despicable manner you see that.

But let me end with a couple of challenges. People often worry about what kind of problem do I have? And we do have three great enemies — the world, the flesh, and the devil. And it is not that these three work independently of one another but together like a three strands of a braided rope. But here is the thing, the concentration of Scripture is not to fight the world or Satan, but the greatest battle and the one that Scripture concentrates on is the human heart. When Satan afflicts Job, the drama is will he curse God and die, will he trust God though all is taken away. It is a human drama about what is going on in our hearts. There are only three passages of Scripture that deal with Spiritual Warfare. They are Ephesians 6:10-18, the armour of God, James 4:7-8, and 1 Peter 5:6-11, at that is it. None of them command us to combat Satan, but this is a human drama, a matter of the heart. The command in all of those passages is to live in his truth given. That is how we draw near to God. We can never say, “Satan made me do it.” We can only say as we battle the world, the flesh, and the devil, I chose to do it. Whatever you are going through, realize the real battle field is not you children, spouse, employer or colleague, family member, or circumstance. The real battle field is your heart. Will you serve Christ?

Because this is the second thing. He is sovereign. That should be apparent in this passage. Therefore nothing in this life will ever separate you from him. We do not need to fear the world or the devil but delightfully fear our great Lord who is for us, and his grace really is enough no matter what we are facing. As close listen to the reassuring words in Romans 8:35-39 of the glory, power, and sustaining nature of our relationship with our God, **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** That is triumphant folks. Take great comfort — the Lord is on our side. He truly gives all that we need in order to reflect his glory.