



SUNDAY SCHOOL JUNE 1, 2025

Prayer:

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New Testament

Acts 16:16-32

PAUL & SILAS IN PRISON

One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities.

When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.”

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell 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. Suddenly there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped.

But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

OVERVIEW

This passage recounts a pivotal episode from Paul’s second missionary journey in Philippi. It begins with Paul and Silas confronting a slave girl possessed by a spirit that brought profit to her owners through fortune-telling. After casting out the spirit, they’re dragged before city officials by angry businessmen, beaten, and imprisoned. In jail, they pray and sing hymns until a supernatural earthquake breaks open the prison. Despite the chance to escape, they remain. The jailer, on the brink of suicide, is saved—not only physically, but spiritually—asking, “*What must I do to be saved?*”

See Addendum on Paul and the Slave Girl

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Placement in Acts:** This episode fits within Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22), marking the expansion of the gospel into Europe.
- **Key Figures:**
 - **Paul and Silas:** Missionaries spreading the Gospel beyond Jewish communities.



- **The slave girl:** Both a victim of exploitation and a spiritual captive.
- **The jailer:** A Roman civil servant whose life is upended by divine power and grace.
- **Themes:**
 - Spiritual liberation (the girl and the jailer)
 - Economic and social disruption caused by the Gospel
 - Worship during suffering
 - Salvation through faith

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Philippi:** A Roman colony populated by retired soldiers and proud Roman citizens. Law and order were tightly enforced, and Roman civil religion shaped daily life.
- **Slavery:** The girl was doubly exploited—for her body and spiritual affliction. Her owners used her as a profitable tool, highlighting the commodification of persons (used only for economic value).
- **Religious Climate:** Christianity was still viewed as a Jewish sect but increasingly seen as disruptive to Roman norms.
- **Roman Legal System:**
 - Paul and Silas were beaten without trial—illegal for Roman citizens.
 - Jailer's role was serious; losing prisoners meant potential execution.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Date of Events:** Likely around **49–51 AD**.
- **Location:** Philippi, Macedonia (modern-day northern Greece).
- **Written:** Acts was likely written by Luke between **80–90 AD**.
- **Paul's Journey:** This is part of his broader effort to plant churches in Gentile regions and extend the Gospel beyond Jewish territory.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY CONTEXT

- **The Slave Girl:**
 - Represents those today who are caught in systems of **exploitation**, whether through labor, addiction, or trafficking.
 - Her deliverance shows how the Gospel confronts **economic injustice** and liberates the marginalized.
- **Paul and Silas in Prison:**
 - A metaphor for the **life of faith in adversity**. Their singing signifies a **faith that doesn't rely on outcomes**, only on the presence of God.
 - In today's terms: people of faith continue to worship even in emotional, spiritual, or social "prisons."
- **The Earthquake:**
 - Not just a physical event, but a metaphor for **divine disruption**—God intervening when systems are unjust or stagnant.
 - In modern society, moments of upheaval (personal or societal) can be opportunities for divine reorientation.
- **The Jailer:**
 - Symbolizes those trapped by **duty, fear, and despair**, who suddenly encounter hope.
 - His question, "*What must I do to be saved?*" is timeless—people today are still longing for purpose, healing, and rescue.



SUMMARY

Acts 16:16–32 is a dramatic narrative about liberation, both spiritual and social. Paul and Silas, despite suffering and injustice, remain centered in worship and trust. Their unwavering faith leads to the deliverance of a slave girl and the transformation of a Roman jailer. It's a story of the Gospel overturning systems of oppression and awakening hearts through unexpected means. From fortune-telling to jail cells to trembling conversions, this passage emphasizes that the power of Christ breaks chains—both literal and figurative.

Gospel

John 27:20-26

JESUS PRAYS TO HIS FATHER BEFORE HIS ARREST

“I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

“The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

“Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.”

OVERVIEW

John 17:20–26 is the final portion of Jesus’ prayer to the Father before his arrest. In these verses, Jesus shifts his focus from praying for his disciples to praying for *future believers*—those who will come to believe through the disciples’ testimony. His central petition is for **unity**—a unity reflective of the oneness between the Father and the Son. Jesus also prays that believers will **behold his glory** and experience the **love** the Father has for him.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Location in Scripture:**
 - This is the **third and final part** of John 17, often referred to as the **High Priestly Prayer**.
 - Precedes the **Passion narrative**: arrest (John 18), trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.
 - Culminates themes from the Farewell Discourses (John 14–16), including unity, glory, love, and future witness.
- **Key Themes in John 17:20–26:**
 - **Unity of believers** (vv. 21–23): “that they may all be one.”
 - **Divine indwelling**: Just as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, believers are invited into that divine relationship.
 - **Glory shared**: Jesus gives his glory to believers (v. 22).



- **Love and knowledge:** The world will know the Father through the love and unity of believers.
- **Eschatological hope:** Jesus desires believers to **be with him and see his glory** (v. 24).

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Historical-Religious Setting (1st Century CE):**
 - Jesus prays this likely in **Jerusalem** after the Last Supper and before crossing the Kidron Valley (John 18:1).
 - Tensions are high: Jewish leaders plot to arrest him, and Roman occupation adds external political pressure.
 - The Jewish temple and sacrificial system are dominant, but Jesus offers a new kind of spiritual access and intimacy with God.
- **Political Context:**
 - Under **Roman rule**, political unrest and expectations for a *Messiah* as a political liberator were common.
 - Jesus rejects political rebellion and instead promotes a **kingdom not of this world** (John 18:36).
 - The unity Jesus prays for stands in stark contrast to the fragmented, sectarian landscape of the time: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes, etc.
- **Implications for Early Church:**
 - These verses are prophetic: early Christians would soon be **scattered**, persecuted, and would **spread the gospel globally**.
 - Unity becomes a major concern in Acts and Paul's letters due to divisions between **Jew and Gentile** converts.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Event	Approximate Date
Jesus' ministry	27–30 CE
High Priestly Prayer (John 17)	30 CE (evening before crucifixion)
Gospel of John written	c. 90–100 CE
Early Church expansion	30s–60s CE

- John 17 was likely composed **after decades of church formation**, with the **theme of unity** responding to internal divisions and theological disputes (e.g., Gnosticism, Jewish-Gentile tensions).

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY CONTEXT

- **Metaphorical Understanding:**
 - **Unity as Reflection of Divine Love:** Jesus' prayer metaphorically paints the church as a mirror of the **Trinitarian relationship**—the unity of believers embodies divine love.
 - **Glory as Witness:** The “glory” given to believers is not celebrity or power, but **the divine character of self-giving love**. It shines in humility, not domination.
 - **Indwelling as Transformation:** The spiritual reality of “Christ in us” points to **inner transformation** and a shared mission, not just doctrinal agreement.
- **Modern-Day Relevance:**
 - In a **fractured world**—politically, culturally, religiously—Jesus' call to oneness challenges:
 - **Denominationalism in Christianity**



- Racial, social, and national divisions
- Individualistic faith detached from community
- Unity doesn't mean **uniformity**, but **relational harmony**, rooted in divine love.
- The **credibility of Christian witness** is directly tied to **how well believers love and live in unity**—a convicting reality in the face of public Christian disunity.

SUMMARY

John 17:20–26 is Jesus' prayer for all future believers. His deep desire is that his followers would live in unity—a unity modeled after the perfect relationship between him and the Father. He speaks of sharing his divine glory and love so that the world might come to know the Father. This passage emphasizes the relational, inclusive, and transformative vision of Jesus for the Church: not isolated individuals, but a **loving, unified body** reflecting God's presence to the world. The passage remains a powerful call today, urging the Church toward **unity, love, and mission** in a divided world.



Addendum

Tying Act 16:16–32 to “Living with Abundant Faith”

Here’s how this passage beautifully aligns with today’s sermon theme:

1. **Abundant Faith Is Courageous**

- Paul and Silas cast out the spirit not for personal gain, but to liberate a young girl—even though they knew it might cost them dearly. Abundant faith takes risks for the sake of others.
- *Today:* Abundant faith doesn’t keep quiet when injustice is profitable.

2. **Abundant Faith Creates Earthquakes**

- The divine shaking of the prison is symbolic of how true faith **disrupts unjust systems**—chains fall, doors open, and people are set free.
- *Today:* Abundant faith may shake up comfort zones, but it also sets people free—from sin, despair, or status quo thinking.

3. **Abundant Faith Cares for the Wounded**

- The jailer, after being stopped from self-harm, becomes a host, a nurse, and a believer. His heart is transformed not just by doctrine, but by **the compassion and stability** Paul and Silas show.
- *Today:* Abundant faith flows outward—transforming how we treat others, even those we once feared or resented.

4. **Abundant Faith Saves More Than One**

- Salvation isn’t limited to the jailer—it extends to his **entire household**. Faith multiplies.
- *Today:* Our faith can have a ripple effect. One life changed can touch an entire family or community.

5. **Abundant Faith Sings in the Dark**

- While bleeding and shackled, Paul and Silas sing hymns. Their faith doesn’t wait for rescue—it *creates* hope through worship.
- *Today:* Abundant faith is not the absence of struggle, but the **presence of joy** in the struggle.

Closing Reflection

Abundant faith doesn’t escape hardship—it shines through it. It casts out injustice, sings through suffering, and stays present in chaos. And when the world shakes, it helps others find solid ground.



Tying John 17:20–26 to “Living with Abundant Faith”

1. Abundance Rooted in Relationship, Not Circumstance

- Jesus prays **not** for his disciples’ comfort, safety, or prosperity—but for their **unity, love, and shared glory** with him.
- Even if external conditions are harsh (as they were for the early church), believers are **rich in communion with God and each other.**

2. Abundance as Witness

- The **unity and love of the Christian community** becomes a testimony of abundance.
- Abundant faith shines *especially* in seasons of trial when people see love, peace, and hope radiate **despite difficulty.**

3. The Gift of Glory as an Abundant Reality

- Jesus is saying believers already possess something *glorious*, not something they’re waiting for in a distant future.
- This speaks to an **abundant identity and purpose** in the here and now—confidence in who we are, regardless of what we face.

4. Love as the Foundation of Abundant Faith

- God’s love **dwelling in us** is the deepest source of abundance.
- When believers know they are **eternally loved**, they are not easily shaken by external losses or scarcity.

Abundant Prayer

*Jesus didn’t pray that we’d always have it easy. He didn’t pray for our wealth or popularity. He prayed for something **abundant**—that we would be one in love, grounded in his glory, and living out of a faith so rich that it speaks to the world around us. That’s the abundance we need—not someday, but right now.*



Paul and the Slave Girl

"These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation."

- On the surface, that sounds like a great endorsement, right?
- She's identifying Paul and Silas correctly: they are **servants of God** and they do proclaim salvation.

So Why Was Paul Annoyed?

1. The Source of Her Proclamation

- The girl was possessed by a *python spirit*, associated with **fortune-telling** and **pagan divination** (linked to the Oracle of Delphi).
- Even though she spoke truth, it came from a source that was spiritually **opposed to God**.

In biblical terms, truth from a corrupt source can **confuse or distort** the message. It's a spiritual integrity issue: **God's message shouldn't be promoted by a demonic spirit.**

2. Misleading Cultural Context

- To a Roman audience in Philippi, the phrase "Most High God" might not have meant **Yahweh**, the God of Israel, but **Zeus** or another high deity in the Greco-Roman pantheon.
- Her announcement could have caused **religious confusion**, making it sound like Paul and Silas were endorsing **polytheism or paganism**.

She was *truth-adjacent*, but it risked leading people in the wrong direction.

3. Disruption of the Mission

- She was doing this **day after day**, following them and calling out.
- Her behavior may have been **disruptive** or even **mocking**, drawing attention in a way that detracted from their message.
- Paul may have discerned that this was **not helping people understand the Gospel** but rather sensationalizing or undermining it.

Imagine trying to share a serious message, and someone loudly chants behind you—even if they're saying something technically correct, it derails the moment.

4. Compassion for the Girl

- Ultimately, Paul casts out the spirit—not to punish her, but to **free her** from spiritual bondage.
- She was being exploited both spiritually and economically.
- **His reaction may seem annoyed on the surface, but it results in liberation.**

Modern Analogy

- **A corrupt influencer** shouts praise for a social cause you care about—but in a way that confuses the message and makes people associate your movement with *them*, their followers, and their scandal. You may not be angry at what they say—but you **don't want your truth tied to their platform.**

Spiritual Principle

- **The Gospel is not just about truth—it's also about *where* the truth comes from, and *how* it's delivered.** Paul's reaction underscores that **truth must be rooted in the Holy Spirit**, not manipulation, distortion, or demonic interference.