

March 6, 2022 by Steve Brandon



The Battle for the Gospel

Acts 16:16-24

1. The Demonic Front (verses 16-18)
2. The Social Front (verses 19-21)
3. The Physical Front (verses 22-24)

War is on our minds these days. How good it is for us to sing the following words:

Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall
There is still one King reigning over all
So I will not fear for this truth remains:
That my God is, the Ancient of Days

This is easy for us to say. But can you imagine yourself being in Ukraine and saying these words?

Though the dread of night overwhelms my soul
He is here with me, I am not alone
O His love is sure, and He knows my name
For my God is, the Ancient of Days

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we have heard of the church in Ukraine that "the church is being the church." That is, the church in Ukraine is using these days as an opportunity to reach out and love others. Are we doing that?

Though I may not see what the future brings
I will watch and wait for the Saviour King
Then my joy complete standing face to face
In the presence of the Ancient of Days^[1]

Indeed, we have no idea what the future will bring.

Eleven days ago, on February 24, 2022, Shortly before 6am in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin "announced that he had made the decision to launch a 'special military operation' in eastern Ukraine." "Within minutes of Putin's announcement, explosions were reported in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa, and the Donbas." For the last week and a half, we have seen the relentless attack of Russia upon Ukraine. they have attacked from the north, from the east, and from the south. and we have seen the courageous fight of the outnumbered Ukrainian people, desperate to keep their freedom.

Thousands from both sides have died in this war already. Over a million Ukrainians have fled into neighboring nations, Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Slovakia, and Romania^[2] Only the Lord knows how and when this onslaught will end. Until then, we must pray, and help in any way that the Lord leads. as war is on our minds.

War was also on the mind of Jesus when he talked about the expansion of the church into this world. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Jesus viewed his church as an attacking army, entering into enemy territory, being resisted by Satan and his foes, and yet, ultimately, overcoming victorious. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Strong as they may appear, the gates of hell will fall. Despite the numerous squadrons of demons, the church will be victorious. What a comfort it is to know that we will win.

But we will not win without our fights. This morning, as we turn to the Scriptures, we will see one of those battles for the gospel. Thus, the title of my message this morning, "The Battle for the Gospel."

We are going to see the fight for the gospel taking place, on several fronts. We will see the battle being fought on the demonic front. We will see the battle being fought on the human front. We will see the battle being fought with flesh and blood.

My message comes from Acts 16:16-24. These verses describe the story of the slave girl's deliverance in Philippi.

Philippi, as you remember, was a stop that Paul and Silas (and Luke and Timothy) made during Paul's second missionary journey. I trust that you remember how they arrived in Philippi. Paul and Silas were sent out from Antioch. They went north through Syria and Cilicia. Eventually arriving at the cities that Paul had visited during his first missionary journey. Cities like Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Psidian Antioch. Along the way they picked up Timothy, who joined them for the journey.

These three men proceeded west into Phrygia and Galatia. They tried to go south into Asia, but they were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to

speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:8). So, they turned north and tried to go into Bithynia, "but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" to go there (Acts 16:7). So, they headed west to Troas. While in Troas two things happened. First, they picked up another member of their group, Luke, the doctor. the author of the book of Acts. Second, Paul received a vision from the "man of Macedonia" who urged him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). So, they went further west, setting sail to Macedonia.

So, after a night on the island of Samothrace, they arrived at the port city of Neapolis, and walked the 10 miles north to Philippi, "a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony" (Acts 16:12). While in Philippi, we read in Acts 16 the stories of how the lives of three people were changed forever. Lydia A slave girl, And a jailor. These weren't the only three who were transformed by the gospel in the city of Philippi. But Luke chose these three to give us a picture of what took place in Philippi.

F. F. Bruce said, "Three individuals are singled out by Luke among those whose lives were influence for good by the gospel at Philippi; they differ so much one from another that he might have thought to have selected the deliberately in order to show how the saving power of the name of Jesus was shown in the most diverse types of men and women."^[3] Their stories give us hope for all sorts of people. Male or female, Young or old, Cultured or uneducated. wealthy or poor. The gospel is for all. It is for all who believe and trust in Jesus. We ought never to look down upon any soul, as out of reach of the Lord Jesus.

Now last week, we looked at the story of how the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to believe the gospel. This week, we will look at the story of the slave girl being delivered from her demon. Next week, we will look at the conversion of the jailer. Our story this week begins in verse 16.

Acts 16:16-24

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 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. 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. And 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.

As I mentioned before, this story tells us of the battle of the gospel in Philippi. Paul and his crew didn't come into Philippi with the welcome mat of grand reception with great fanfare. No. They came quietly. One of the first places they went was down by the riverside where a few women had gathered for prayer. One of them, Lydia, received the gospel and took the missionaries into their home. All of that took place without much opposition. But, the opposition was coming. It was coming when Paul's message began to hit the pocketbooks of some men in Philippi. And, as they say, "All hell broke loose."

Simon Kistemaker says in his commentary, "Wherever the church develops, Satan tries to obstruct the work of God's servants."^[4] That's what we see in these verses. We the opposition against Paul and his missionary friends. So, Paul fights his first battle here in Philippi. I'm calling it ...

1. The Demonic Front (verses 16-18)

Because, that's what Paul faced in the life of this little slave girl. He faced a fight not with the girl, but with the demonic world. This girl is introduced in verse 16,

Acts 16:16

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.

Now, this girl was everything that Lydia was not. Lydia was a professional woman, on the top end of the social scale. This slave girl, was from the bottom of the social scale.^[5] Lydia was the sort of woman that you would gladly have in your home for dinner, polite and cultured. You may well have be fearful to have this slave girl in your house, because you would have no idea what she might do to your home.

Verse 16 tells us that she had "a spirit of divination." Literally, she had a "python" spirit. which references back to Greek mythology. The python guarded the shrine of Delphi, where oracles were given. Eventually, Apollo, the Greek diety, was able to gain the power of the oracles by killing the python with 100 arrows. This girl, somehow had the spiritual power of divination. She was a fortune teller, who could tell the fortunes of those who would come to her.

When you think about this girl, what comes into your mind? I think of a small girl, in a dark place with a sad look on her face with little hope in this world.

Now, there are many questions about this girl. What sort of fortunes could she tell? Was she a sham? Or, could she really tell the future? What role did the evil spirit in her play? Could the demon in her really tell the future? Or perhaps interfere with future events to bring about what was predicted? We have no idea. But we do know that she "brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling" (Acts 16:16). However she worked her trade, it worked. Yet, it didn't help her much. It helped her owners, who handled her.

She was an exploited and abused girl. She was a victim, if you will, of human trafficking, controlled and enslaved by wicked men, who were using her for their own profit. One can hardly paint a more hopeless case of a human being. She was in the clutches of evil men.

Paul had first encountered this girl when on his way "to the place of prayer" (Acts 16:16). This "place of prayer" was down by the river. It is where Paul had met Lydia some days before (verse 13). Apparently, this was a frequent place where Paul was visiting. And verse 17 tells us what this girl did.

Acts 16:17

She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."

Picture the scene: Paul, the newcomer to the city, was being affirmed by the one who was known throughout Philippi, this fortune teller. She was saying, "These men are true followers of God! They are bringing a message from God to you! They are telling you how you may be saved!" The only thing lacking from her proclamation is the admonition, "Listen to them!"

Isn't this odd? A fortune-telling girl, empowered by an evil spirit to be telling the truth about Paul? Directing others to listen and follow their message? It's not so odd. James tells us that the demons believe in God (James 2:19). and they are orthodox in their faith, they know their doom and shudder about it (James 2:9).

During the ministry of Jesus, he encountered similar spirits. In Mark, chapter 1, we read of the encounter that Jesus had with the man in the synagogue with the unclean spirit. He cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." (Mark 1:24). Jesus rebuked that spirit saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" (Mark 1:25). This is similar to what Paul does.

Acts 16:18

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.

Again, we are filled with questions. Why did Paul rebuke the unclean spirit in this girl, especially if she was speaking the truth? especially after Paul had tolerated her behavior, "for many days." I think that the key comes in verse 18, Paul was "greatly annoyed" at this girl. She wasn't a help. Perhaps her words were so incessant that she was interrupting Paul. Sure, she might be saying the right things, but, she wasn't helping the cause of the gospel, but was hurting it.

Perhaps here is the greatest point of application for us at this point: Just because someone is telling the truth, doesn't mean that they are helping the gospel! I picture the preacher who preaches the gospel well, but it living a lie at home. verbally abusing his wife and children, engaged in evil deeds, himself. The words may be right. But his life is wrong. In the end, he is hurting the cause of the gospel. When truth comes to light, the damage he does will be proportional to the size of his platform.

I also picture the co-worker, who knows enough theology and Bible to speak forth the truth, but his life is a contradiction. He is not helping the gospel I remember having a conversation with a pool buddy of mine. He was telling me about this person in his life who constantly talks about Jesus. But his life didn't quite match up. My buddy said, "I know he's religious, but he's a jerk." Such people might be talking about Christianity. But they are a hindrance to the gospel, and not a help.

So, I would encourage you to be discerning about others. Just because they are saying the right things, doesn't mean that they are on the side of the gospel. They may be spies, infiltrating behind enemy lines, looking to do destruction and not good.

I would encourage you to look at your own life. Is your life helping the cause of the gospel that you are seeking to proclaim?

Getting back to the account in the book of Acts, we see Paul rebuking this demon in this slave girl. and it came out of her immediately. But this is war on the demonic front.

I love the power of the name of Christ. "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." (verse 18). Later, Paul would write to those in Philippi, ...

Philippians 2:9-11

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is what we see. We see this evil spirit bow to the name of Jesus, coming out of the girl. When it comes to us, we may not face demon-possessed fortune tellers. But in no way does this mean that we aren't engaged in spiritual warfare! "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. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:12-13).

When it comes to the spiritual realm, we are at war against the devil, every bit as much as the Russian soldiers and Ukrainian people are at war with each other. So, take up the armor of God, take up the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, and wage your war against the demonic front!

We need to move on. Not only do we see the battle for the gospel on the demonic front. We also see it on ...

2. The Social Front (verses 19-21)

By "Social Front," I don't mean social issues. It mean the pressure that comes when Christians take a stand in society. This is what we see in

verses 19-21.

Acts 16:19-21

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. 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."

It is interesting here how the focus has shifted. It has shifted away from the slave girl to her owners. We don't know what happened to this girl. But all of the commentators that I read say that we should assume that she became a follower of Jesus, and joined up with the church in Philippi. We don't know for sure.

For some reason, Luke didn't tell us what happened to this girl. Instead, he focused upon her owners, her handlers, if you will. And they were not happy. Because of Paul, their checkbooks were taking a hit. No more easy money for them! As a result, they were angered against Paul and his friends.

Acts 16:19

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.

They performed a citizens' arrest by bringing Paul and Silas to the rulers of the city against their will. Literally, they "dragged them" there. That is, they brought them to the rulers against their will. They brought them to the "marketplace," because that was the "social center of the city."^[6]

For us, this may sound strange. We don't drag people before the judge and demand an instant trial. We work through our lawyers, and write up a document suing our enemies who have defrauded us in some way. And in the course of time, through the civil authorities, our day in court will come. But in those days, this was perfectly legal. Simon Kistemaker says, "The owners of the slave girl were acting according to Roman law when they laid their hands on Paul and Silas and put their grievance before the city authorities."^[7]

They brought up two accusations: The first comes in verse 20: "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city." The second accusation comes in verse 21: "They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." Both of these accusations are mere smokescreens for their real grievance. They were really upset because of their financial loss. They were ready to drag Paul and Silas before the authorities to air their complaint.

There is a great lesson to be learned here: Whenever someone is upset or angry, it's always because of some other desire. You think that you simply raise the temperature in the room, and get what you want. This is often the case. The angry husband will rage against his wife and children, and they have learned to bend for the sake of peace. And the angry husband gets his way. The child throwing a temper tantrum has learned, that eventually, his parents will give in to his demands. So the rage ensues.

But I say this, church family, whenever you see anger or rage, know that something else is going on in the heart. Brad Bigney writes, ...

When someone is in a rage at home or in public, you can be sure that someone *e/se* has threatened one of his or her idols—and war is about to break out! Anger, irritability, and verbal outbursts are indicative of heart issues gone awry. When you react to someone else, what is it that you are protecting? What is it that you must have? ... The conflicts that you're having can be traced back to your own desires, as we see in James 4:1–2, ["What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.]

[Your desire] causes war between you and anyone who gets in the way of that desire"^[8]

It's not always clear what that desire is. But it's always worth digging a bit to see if you can figure out exactly what that desire is, so that you can deal with it on the heart level.

Now, when it comes to Philippi, we see the battle for the gospel on the social front. We see these men, these owners of this slave girl, wanting/desiring the profits that came with this girl's powers. But now they are gone. So, they are not happy. They are not happy because they are not getting what they want! That's why they dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities on masked up charges. First off, they say, ...

Acts 16:20

"These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city."

That's why Timothy and Luke were not dragged before the authorities. They were Gentiles, or at least they looked like Gentiles. Luke was fully Gentile. Timothy was half Gentile. The Jews were hated in those days, just like today. They were blamed for "disturbing the city."

At this point, we see that there was certainly more going on in Philippi than Luke tells us. All we know so far of is Lydia and her household coming to Christ. Perhaps by this time, however, their followers had grown enough to be a "disturbance in the city." When we get to chapter 17, in the city of Thessalonica, we will find out that they were accused of "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Their second charge (in verse 21) is that ...

Acts 16:21

"They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."

Here they are making a jump. Because the gospel transformed this slave girl, and she was no longer able to perform her magic, (as that is not consistent with the gospel.) These Romans felt that Paul was telling them that they could no longer practice their magical arts! Such was not Paul's message at all! The world can do as it wishes! The preaching of the gospel simply says what will happen to such people who keep on in their sin! The world hates it, because they feel condemned! And so they fight against it. In no way was Paul forcing these Romans to live as he lived. (He didn't have the power or authority to do such a thing). Yet, they felt threatened by his words.

This isn't too far off from our culture today. We are fighting a culture war on the social front. We advocate for the life of the unborn, and are hated by the world. We proclaim that homosexuality is sin, and are hated by the world as a result.

What is happening today in our world is that social pressure is being placed upon us all, not merely to tolerate the deviant LGBTQxyz behavior, but to accept it, and approve of it! If we do not approve of it, we will face the wrath of the world.

Just ask Jack Phillips owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado. He has been fighting the war on the social front of the gospel for years. He "drew national attention in 2012 when he said his religious beliefs kept him from making a custom wedding cake for a same-sex couple." That lawsuit eventually went before the Supreme Court in 2018, where he was vindicated. Yet, less than a year ago, another case was brought. In June 2021, "a judge ... found the Masterpiece Cakeshop illegally refused to bake a cake to celebrate a trans woman's birthday and identity, saying it violated the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act (CADA)."^[9] I'm sure that this case will continue on through the courts. I won't be surprised if it makes it to the Supreme Court again.

Jack Phillips' case is the public one. But we battle with our friends and neighbors on a smaller level, trying to toe the line of accepting others as made in the image of God, and yet, not approving of their behavior. Have you battled with this? Yvonne and I have. We have tried to lay out for people what God's word says in a loving way. Yet, we have faced the wrath of those who disagree.

We all need to wage war on this front. We need to wage war individually with those who think that this is acceptable behavior before God. It's hard. But war is never easy.

Finally, we turn to the last battle front of our text. It is ...

3. The Physical Front (verses 22-24)

By this I mean the physical suffering that comes to those who follow after Christ.

Acts 16:22-24

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And 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.

Paul and Silas suffered greatly in their battle for the gospel. Just imagine it with me. Having your shirts ripped off of your body by the crowds under order of the judge so that your back is exposed. Then, imagine with me, some people take rods, and they begin pounding your back. Not only lacerating your skin, but causing deep muscle bruises, perhaps causing ligaments to tear, and even some broken bones. Not just a whack or two, but "many blows" (verse 23).

Then, thrown into prison. Not like a prison we think about which is warm in the winter and air conditioned in the summer. But four cold walls with little to manage the sewage. Further the darkness would be deep. No windows. No fresh air. And not just any part of the prison, but the "inner prison," the place reserved for the most dangerous criminals, where they must be kept as secure as possible.

Finally, we read that their feet were placed in stocks. That is, secured in place, so that they cannot move. These stocks were created, not only for security for discomfort. The prisoner would be forced to sit on the ground with his feet elevated. In some instances, the stocks were such that his legs would be spread apart. Lying motionless for hours on end would have caused discomfort and cramping and pain in the legs.

If anything strikes me about these verses, it's the injustice of it all. Paul and Silas simply came into town with a message of hope! The message did good, by granting Lydia eternal life. This slave girl was released from her oppressors, giving her freedom from the human trafficking. What was the result of this good? They were hated and beaten and despised. They were not given a fair trial.

Without any discussion, the magistrates ordered the mob to "beat them with rods." Mob violence is terrifying! As a result, they suffered greatly as a result.

But this is what happens in war, doesn't it. Think about those in Ukraine. Think about the suffering that they are experiencing. Many have died. Many have been injured in the bombing. Millions have been displaced. Think about losing your home. Think about being separated from your family. Think about walking in the cold and mud for days, not knowing what lies ahead for you, or the millions of other refugees. Think about the children, none of whom chose this suffering in any way at all. Yet, they are bearing the brunt of much of it.

Now, if you think about the Christian life, not as a vacation, but as a war, You will be able to endure these things. War is unjust! Christians will experience injustice as they seek to minister the gospel to others. So, expect it. Expect the physical sufferings that come. In fact, this is what Paul told those in Philippi to expect. "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (Philippians 1:29-30).

Now, we live in America, where we will probably not suffer. In fact, have you ever met anyone who has been physically beaten for the gospel like Paul and Silas were? I have. I remember on a missions trip to Nepal meeting a faithful pastor who had been beaten on feet for preaching the gospel. His torturers beat him there because those who would come and examine him were unable to see what the bottom of his feet

looked like. I remember him telling that story and feeling privileged to know such a precious soul who had suffered physically for the cause of Christ.

These things happen today in other nations where it is illegal to preach the gospel. Though we may not face the physical sufferings, we still do battle on the social front (see point #2) by facing ridicule. But be ready on the physical front to fight the gospel war. Jesus said, "Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20).

Did they persecute Jesus? Yes, they did. Did they beat Jesus? Yes, they did. They put him to death. They put him to an unjust death. In fact, Jesus died the most unjust death of anyone in the world. At least we (and the Ukrainians and the apostles) are sinners, deserving God's wrath against us. Any physical wrong done to us is a picture of what we ultimately deserve. But Jesus never sinned! He never sinned even once. He, of all human beings didn't deserve suffering at all! But Jesus was hated by the world and abandoned by his heavenly father (Psalm 22:1).

Jesus said, "But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause'" (John 15:25). Without any reason, they hated Jesus. But the injustice that came upon him comes unjustly to us as well. When we believe in Christ, though we deserve death, we get life! Jesus took the beatings and the death that we deserved, so that we might get the life that we don't deserve.

This is the gospel. Do you believe it?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 9, 2022 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Michael Ray Farren, Rich Thompson, Jesse Reeves, Jonny Robinson, "The Ancient of Days" (see <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/cityalight/ancientofdays.html>).

[2] See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>.

[3] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 312.

[4] Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 501.

[5] See William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 124.

[6] Kistemaker, 505.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Brad Bigney, *Gospel Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), (Bigney, Gospel Treason, chapter 1).

[9] <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/18/us/jack-phillips-colorado-baker-discrimination-trnd/index.html>