

FRUIT #2: JOY
(Acts 16:16-40)
1.27.19

INTRODUCTION

Jerome Horowitz = “Curly” of the 3 Stooges. Timberwolves game/halftime video.

TEXT: ACTS 16:16-40

Paul is now on his second missionary journey, so we are talking about 49-52 AD. Because of a disagreement with the Barnabas, his partner on his first trip, on this journey he takes a guy named Silas. They start in Derbe and Lystra (in the south-central part of present-day Turkey) and there were joined by Timothy. This was kind of an “encouragement tour” as their intention was to visit churches that had been started on his first missionary endeavor and see how they were doing. As Luke writes: *[T]he churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers — Acts 16:5.*

It was during this time in their journey, as they tried to determine where to go next, that Paul *had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” — Acts 16:9.* That settled it, and they immediately left, convinced that God was leading them to continue their missionary efforts in that area. What is significant about this is that, for the first time, the gospel is leaving the continent of Asia and moving westward into Europe. And the first town in which they would be planting the initial seeds of gospel ministry was Philippi.

Philippi was on a major east-west trade route, making it a commercial as well as agricultural center, and it also was a Roman colony, having received this status in 30 BC, which conveyed a city of Roman privilege and favor, all of this making it the most important city in eastern Macedonia. As a Roman colony, many army veterans were settled there. Residents of the city were granted Roman citizenship. The city itself was self-governing (versus being ruled by the governor of the province in which they were located), and they were exempt from many of the usual taxes that people under Roman rule endured. The population has been roughly estimated as between 10-15,000 people at the time of Paul’s ministry. Incidentally, the city was named for Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great.

We can assume that there was an extremely small Jewish population in Philippi when Paul arrived. Jewish tradition held that at least 10 Jewish males were needed to begin a synagogue. So, they found where the few local Jews did meet — mostly women — alongside a river. The river would have provided water for the ritual cleansing that would have been a part of Jewish worship. It was there that they met Lydia, a seller of purple cloth — a luxury item affordable by only those of wealth and means. She was likely a Gentile who worshiped God with what knowledge she had been able to pick up from Jewish friends. But then she met Paul, and her life changed. She was eventually baptized, as were the believing members of her household. Lydia then opened up her home to Paul’s group as a place to stay while they were in Philippi; it is possible that her residence became the house church in which the Philippian Christians first met.

Important points regarding the exorcism Paul commanded on the slave girl:

Satan is FINITE, not infinite. Though powerfully way beyond us, he is a created being who is still completely under the rule of God. As a finite being, he cannot be everywhere at once, nor can he know the future. That is God’s domain:

“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” — God speaking, Isaiah 46:10a.

What the girl is shouting is accurate: “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way of salvation.” Identifying a spirit’s name (“Most High God”) was sometimes believed as a way to gain control and authority of it.

But while her words were accurate, Paul saw that her method — shouting at the top of her lungs — was going to drive people away from his message. Obviously, Paul wanted people to feel invited to hear his message — much like when people cross over to the other side of the street when they hear a loud street preacher or some kind of disturbance taking place on the side of the street they are on. Also, there was no way that Paul wanted his message in Christ to be linked in any way, shape or form with the demonic activity inhabiting that girl’s life. Truth and evil do not mix.

The charges were not about losing their income (they couldn’t care less about the girl), even though their moneymaking was now at an end. The charges instead were:

Being Jewish: would have fed into latent anti-Semitism that was already present, plus xenophobia (fear of foreigners). Also, it was around this time that the emperor in Rome, Claudius, had banished all Jews from that city (about 50 AD).

Throwing the city into an uproar: causing civic unrest was considered a very serious crime in an orderly Roman society.

Advocating unlawful customs: technically true that Roman citizens were not to engage in any foreign religion that had not been sanctioned by the state. In fact, it was illegal in the Empire to convert to any religion not approved by the state. It was also illegal for Jews, whose faith was protected under Roman law, to try to convert Roman citizens. It was dangerous in the ancient world in general both to deny gods officially sanctioned by the governing authorities and to introduce new ones. Christianity’s mission to ***“[g]o into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” — Jesus Christ, Mark 16:15*** would have been both challenging and contrary to such sensibilities.

The punishment “beaten with rods” was a Roman punishment that was very cruel. Cities using Roman law were ruled over by magistrates whose job it was to maintain civil order. Each magistrate was in turn served by two attendants who carried bundles of wooden rods that were bound together as a symbol both of the magistrate’s authority and of their inherent right to order corporal punishment. As opposed to being flogged, which was standardized into a specific number of lashes (“forty minus one” = 39), being beaten with rods could continue for as long as the magistrate chose; thus, the punishment that was inflicted could be incredibly severe. This punishment was normally administered before trial as a means of obtaining information; not coincidentally, the Latin term for this is the basis from which we get our English word, “coercion.” Being completely stripped before this public punishment just added to the humiliation associated with such treatment.

After punishment was prison and stocks.

APPLICATION — Keeping an Eye on the Invisible

So, what is joy? Joy is gladness not based on circumstances. The world says, “I need to find joy.” The Christian says, “Jesus is my joy.” It is keeping an eye on the invisible. What was it Connor read? *[W]e fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal — Paul, II Corinthians 4:18.*

Joy by keeping an eye on the invisible is what David was describing when he wrote: *I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure — David, Psalm 16:8-9.*

Joy beyond circumstances is what Paul was describing when he wrote — from prison: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! — Paul, Philippians 4:4.*

So, what is OUR basis for joy? As Christians we can know . . . First, we can know joy because we are always living in the forgiveness of God. *Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come — Paul, II Corinthians 1:21-22 (also cite Galatians 3:27 — “clothed with Christ”).* It is the joy of living in a well-made house, knowing that nothing outside can hurt us. We live in the Master’s house. It don’t get any better than that!

Second, we can know joy because we are always living in the presence of God.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you” — Moses, Deuteronomy 31:6

“[S]urely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b.

Third, we can know joy because we are living in the promised eternity of God.

“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” — Jesus Christ, John 14:2-3 (NKJV).

Therefore, with all those things we have to claim, we can live as Nehemiah said: *“The joy of the Lord is your strength” — Nehemiah 8:10b.*

CONCLUSION

Paul Alexander saw a church sign: “Joy is peace dancing; peace is joy resting.” What a great message! The two are absolutely related to each other, and next week we will be visiting that third fruit of the Spirit: peace. But in the meantime, the world is sad and broken, fighting and racked with dissensions and factions. We have joy. Joy lets the world know that our moments are temporary, that there is a genuinely different way to view things. It doesn’t have to be the world’s way. There is something better!