



ACTS 16:13-40 ESV

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, 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. 15 And after she was 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. 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. 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." 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. 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. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 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. 27 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. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. 35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." 37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." 38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. 40 So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

STRUCTURE (I included vv. 6-12 because they belong to the same literary unit)

- I. God sovereignly guides Paul's team—to some praying women (16:6-12)
- II. God sovereignly opens Lydia's heart—at the place of prayer (16:13-15)
- III. God sovereignly delivers a demonized slave—on the way to prayer (16:16-18)
- IV. God sovereignly frees physical and spiritual prisoners—in response to prayer (16:19-40)
 - a. Paul and Silas thrown in prison (16:19-24)
 - b. Prisoners and Jailer set free (16:25-34)
 - c. Paul and his companions depart (16:35-40)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Paul and his team continue city-hopping and church planting, this time in Philippi. They arrive in response to a dream. This initiates a series of stories that collectively highlight themes of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. From the divine side, God uses a flimsy dream to guide his preeminent missionary apostle across a continent; God sovereignly opens Lydia's heart to receive the gospel; God delivers a girl from both physical and spiritual slavery; God liberates inmates from a physical and spiritual prison.

From the human side, Luke emphasizes the role of prayer and proclamation. Why does God drag Paul across a continent? To meet some praying women. The slave girl and the prisoners are likewise delivered in the context of prayer. The church in Philippi was borne because of God's sovereign leadership and liberation, but it was also borne by the faithfulness of Paul's team to pray and proclaim Christ no matter the circumstances.

God is sovereign, but we can't take His sovereignty for granted. We must pray. We must worship. We must proclaim Jesus. We must not be deterred by human or spiritual forces. When we do these things, the Good Shepherd and Opener of Hearts will blaze the trail before us. All of us are missionaries to the world around us. The good news is that God is the first missionary. He came first to us in Jesus, and now He goes before us through His sovereign Spirit.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, 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. 15 And after she was 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.

—"And on the Sabbath day":

- The conjunction "And" connects this story with what came before.
- Beginning in verse 6, the Holy Spirit led Paul's team through opened doors, closed doors, and a dream. This story results from the sovereign leadership of the Holy Spirit, who directed them to this particular time ("Sabbath") and place ("Philippi").
- Normally, Paul entered a synagogue on the Sabbath. He would begin his outreach to Jews, followed then by Gentiles. This reflected a covenantal pattern whereby God promised Abraham, the Jew, "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3)—first the Jews, then the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10).
- Apparently, then, Philippi did not have a Jewish synagogue. Establishment of a synagogue required a quorum of ten men, and Luke emphasizes the presence of "women who had come together" for prayer. Without a synagogue to attend, Paul joined the Jewish gathering of worshipers to continue his Jew-first evangelism.

—"outside the gate to the riverside where we supposed there was a place of prayer":

- Schnabel says that the text does not necessitate an open-air meeting. This could have been someone's home or another kind of building by the river.
- Schnabel: "Some diaspora Jewish communities preferred to build their meeting places outside the city near a body of water. The river could be used for ceremonial immersion."
- God directed them beyond Phrygia and Galatia (v. 6); He shut the door on Asia and Mysia (vv. 6-7); He shepherded them to Troas (v. 8) and now Philippi (vv. 12ff). In other words, God dragged His preeminent missionary apostle across a continent to preach the gospel to a small handful of praying women. Prayer matters.
- God is sovereign, but He uses prayer. Throughout this story, God's sovereignty and human responsibility intersect.

—"sat down and spoke to the women who had come together": Sitting down was the normal posture for a teacher. Even though the gathering comprised of women, not men, it seems to have functioned as their Sabbath day worship meeting, which included discourse about the Law. Paul used it to introduce the One to whom the Law pointed: Jesus.

—"Lydia... Thyatira, a seller of purple goods... worshiper of God":

- "worshiper of God" meant that Lydia was not Jewish by birth but by religion.
- "Thyatira":
 - Thyatira was in Asia! Fascinating. God slammed the door shut when Paul wanted to preach in Asia, but then He guided Paul to preach to an Asian living away from her home, in Philippi.
 - God honored their heart to want to reach Asians, but He did so not by taking them to Asia. He took them to Philippi to reach an Asian. When God sees goodness in our heart—even if

He says “no”—He loves to find an alternative “yes.” This reminds me of David wanting to build God a house. God said no, but then He did David one better. He said, “Since you sought to build Me a house, I’ll instead build your house—your dynasty—so that through you a Messianic King will save the world.”

- In what ways has God honored my heart with His “alternative yes”? I wanted to go to seminary, and God said no. But then two years later, He sent me a seminary professor to personally disciple me for many years. It was good that I wanted to learn more about the Bible and the things of God. But God seminary didn’t fit His plan for my life.
- Can you think of any “alternative yes” that God has given you?
- That God shut the door on Asia but then sent Paul to reach an Asian in Philippi also highlights the nature of the commission of Acts 1:8 (“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... Judea... Samaria... and the ends of the earth”). The calling to reach all nations is not merely geographical; it is ethnic. When we reach Iranians, Cubans, Russians, and Venezuelans in Oklahoma City, we are reaching the nations in our own backyard.
- “seller of purple goods”: Thyatira was famous for purple dyes, which only the wealthy could afford. Lydia was a businesswoman, and probably wealthy.

—“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”

- I can open my mouth to proclaim Jesus, but if God doesn’t open the heart, no fruit will be borne.
- This continues the theme of sovereignty begun in vv. 6-10, where God sovereignly guided Paul’s mission. Now, He sovereignly opens Lydia’s heart.
- God knows how to guide us to where the fish are biting. The fish weren’t biting in Asia (v. 6), but this one Asian took the gospel bait, and she became a new person.
- Specifically, God opened Lydia’s heart “to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” She didn’t dismiss Paul’s words, as often happens in evangelism. Instead, she devoured every word. God opened her heart to see and savor Jesus Christ.

—“And after she was baptized”:

- God opened her heart not only to pay attention to Paul’s words but to receive them.
- “after she was baptized” reminds us that baptism should occur promptly after conversion. There should be no prolonged waiting period as has often been practiced in church history.
- “after she was baptized” also reflects a pattern throughout Acts whereby baptism is viewed as part of conversion. If faith and repentance are conversion of the heart—sufficient for salvation—baptism consummates our conversion outwardly. An unbaptized Christian is like someone who gets common-law married. It’s technically valid, but only technically. If a Christian feels content to remain unbaptized, he not only walks in open disobedience; he also forces us to question the validity of his supposed heart-conversion. When God converts the heart, true Christians naturally wish to consummate that conversion with baptism.

—“and her household as well”:

- This is the second household conversion story in Acts (see Acts 10-11: Cornelius’s household is converted). A third will occur in this same chapter when the jailer and his whole household are baptized (vv. 31, 34). It is enough to constitute a theme of the chapter. We will explore this more under v. 31.
- Proponents of infant baptism offer this as support for their position, but the text says nothing of infants being baptized. A “household” would have included extended family members, servants, former servants who remained linked to the family, dependents such as orphans or widows, and in some cases, even business partners. A biblical “household” is one’s closest social network. For someone like Lydia, we can imagine that her business relationships comprised part of the oikos.
- Could not such a vast network have included infants? Maybe, or maybe not. Even if her network included infants, that does mean that “her household as well” means that the infants were baptized too. No doubt, some of Lydia’s business partners and associates were unconverted. The phrase, “her household as well” simply means that many in her household were baptized. It would be like if I

said, "The Rowntree household attended our family reunion." This would not imply that every single extended family member attended but rather that many or most of them did.

- For something as significant as baptism, it is hard to imagine that God expected us to baptize infants without ever issuing the command or even mentioning it once. Proponents of infant baptism must arrive at their conclusions based on assumptions from the text rather than direct statements. Their most compelling case comes from church history. This is indeed compelling, but we can't defend a doctrine entirely from church history when the Scriptures are silent on the issue.

—"urged us... prevailed upon us":

- Lydia's conversion bore the fruit of radical hospitality. God opened her heart; therefore, she opened her home: "come to my house and stay."
- Being a woman of means, she had space for Paul's whole team (Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke). It seems likely that her home became the venue for their house church.

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. 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." 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.

—"As we were going to the place of prayer":

- Luke is our New Testament theologian of prayer. He commonly mentions significant events associated with the activity. First, Lydia and her household are saved because God opened her heart in the place of prayer. Now, en route to a prayer meeting, God expels a demon and saves a young girl from slavery.
- Paul did not just go to the place of prayer in v. 13 because he assumed there would be opportunities to share the gospel; he actually went to pray. Prayer was his lifestyle. This is why he continues "going to the place of prayer" in v. 16.

—"a slave girl who had a spirit of divination":

- As a slave she "brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling." She earned, but didn't keep. She did not own her proceeds; she did not even own her own self.
- "spirit" = demon.
- "spirit of divination":
 - There exist different kinds of spirits: "deaf and mute spirit" (Mark 9:25); "unclean spirit" (Mark 1:23); "spirit of infirmity" (Luke 13:11); "spirit of antichrist" (1 Jhn. 4:3); "lying spirit" (1 Kng. 22:22).
 - Jesus says, "**This kind** does not come out except by prayer" (Mark 9:29). There are various kinds of spirits.
 - Some kinds are more wicked than others (Matt. 12:43-45).
 - "spirit of divination" = "fortune-telling" spirit. The Greek word for this is "Pythos", from which we derive the word "Python." Some less-used translations (YLT, DBY) render it, "Python spirit."
 - Stott: "The reference is to the snake of classical mythology which guarded the temple of Apollo and the Delphic oracle at Mount Parnassus. Apollo was thought to be embodied in the snake and to inspire 'pythonesses', his female devotees, with clairvoyance..."
 - Schnabel: "The term python refers to the enormous female dragon (or snake) called Python, which Apollo killed near Delphi; the town and the god were given the name Pytho. The Greek term python came to designate a 'spirit of divination' and was then also used of ventriloquists, who were believed to have such a spirit dwelling in their belly. The syntax of the Greek can be read in two ways: the slave girl had a spirit named Python, or she had a pythonic spirit, i.e., a spirit that produced oracles. The latter is certainly what was happening: the girl was 'giving oracles,' perhaps speaking with her belly. She foretold the future or used her abilities to inform clients how to protect themselves from misfortune or

how to harm their enemies—psychic gifts that attracted people who paid for her services and that consequently brought ‘great profit’ for her ‘owners.’”

- It’s interesting that Luke refers to the demon by the name of the false god she represented. This suggests that the various names of Hindu gods, the Muslim god Allah, and others, could be cast out by their false-god label. For instance, “I cast out the spirit of Vishnu in the name of Jesus.”
- This is corroborated by church history. In the third century, Tertullian said, “For we, by invoking the name of our God, cast out the demons from the bodies of the possessed, and **we drive them out by the very name of their gods—by the name of their false gods—** showing that the devil himself and all his legion are subject to us, as are the gods of the pagans.”
- Demons are not omniscient. Yahweh is unique in His knowledge of the future (Isa. 46:9-10). If demons can know the future, it is only in a limited sense. Perhaps it is by manipulating circumstances to bring about outcomes they “predicted.”

—“followed Paul... crying out...”:

- It’s interesting that someone with a demon would follow Paul. It’s even more interesting that they proclaimed a true message: that these are “servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation”!
- Why would a demon do this? Given the theme of God’s sovereignty, it seems to me like God made the demons “play their hand”—revealing that Paul’s team sided with truth, implying that they, the demons, were merely imposters.
- We see a similar phenomenon in the Gospels, where demons speak truth about Christ’s identity (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; 8:28). This story thus associates Paul’s ministry with our Lord’s. Both ministries force spirits to play their hand—and fold.

—“she kept doing this for many days”: This was a prolonged demonic manifestation. Luke provides no explanation for why Paul did not act sooner.

—“Paul, having become greatly annoyed”: or, “grieved.” Paul’s emotional aggravation led him to cast the spirit out. “having become” suggests that it took time for Paul to arrive at this place where he could no longer tolerate the disruption. Perhaps this helps explain the delay. Paul was not trying to create the scene that eventually ensued. It just happened.

—“I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her”: Casting out demons does not require long magical incantations as was the case for other religions who attempted such. More church history explaining the difference between Christian exorcists and non-Christian who attempt it:

- Justin Martyr (2nd century): “Every demon exorcised in the name of the Son of God, the First-born of all creatures, who was born of a virgin and endured human suffering, who was crucified by your nation under Pontius Pilate, who died and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven—every demon exorcised in this name is mastered and subdued. Whereas if you exorcise in the name of any king or righteous man, or prophet, or patriarch, who has been one of yourselves, no demon will be subject to you. . . . **Your exorcists, I have already said, are like the Gentiles in using special arts, employing fumigation and magic incantations.**”
- Tertullian (3rd century): “For **it is not by incantations that Christians seem to prevail (over evil spirits), but by the name of Jesus,** accompanied by the announcement of the narratives which relate to Him; for the repetition of these has frequently been the means of driving demons out of men, especially when those who repeated them did so in a sound and genuinely believing spirit.”

—“And it came out that very hour”: does this mean “immediately,” or “around that time?” We do not know. It seems possible that Luke has summarized the exorcism prayers with the simple command to come out in Jesus’s name. In our Lord’s ministry, demons sometimes left immediately, and on at least one occasion, it took some time (Mark 5:8: note the verb tense, “he was saying to him, ‘Come out...’”)

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. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as

Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.

—"when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone":

- They claimed to seize Paul because they had introduced dangerous customs; in truth, they seized Paul because their income stream had dried up by God's power.
- In verse 18, Paul commanded the spirit to "come out" (Gk. *exerchomai*), and it "came out" (Gk. *exerchomai*) at that very hour. Now in verse 19, the owners saw that their income stream "was gone" (Gk. *exerchomai*)—just like the spirit.
- In exorcizing the demon, Paul likewise exorcized their profits. In delivering this woman from slavery, Paul likewise delivered these men from illicit revenues. It seemed like a curse to them, but it was truly a blessing.

—"crowd joined in attacking... magistrates tore garments":

- Without any trial or judicial procedure, the city leaders succumbed to public pressure. Rather than governing their jurisdiction with prudence and sobriety, the people intoxicated them with secondary rage.
- We can't expect the world to understand us or to act in a rational manner.

—"beat them with rods":

- This appears to be one of the severe beatings suffered by Paul, as he explains in 2 Corinthians 11:25: "three times, I was beaten with rods..." In that context, Paul argues that his apostleship is validated by extreme suffering.
- We tend to feel validated when we prosper; Paul felt validated when he suffered. What would it look like for us to change our perspectives to be like his? The prosperity gospel is so insidious that even when we don't espouse it, deep down, we believe its (false) core tenet: "*God's favor manifests in my prosperity, not my pain.*"

23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 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. 27 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. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

—"many blows... inner prison... fastened with stocks":

- The jailer knew that if he did not "keep them safely"—if they escaped—he would be tortured to death. This explains the high security lockdown. Paul and Silas were treated like Al Capone or El Chapo.
- Paul's character was blameless, yet the world treated him like a villain. His suffering was more than just physical. His character was assassinated.
- When we walk with Christ, sometimes people will assassinate our character.

—"About midnight":

- While the world slept, Paul and Silas were awake. These contrasting states reflected not just their physical bodies but their spiritual lives. The world was asleep to Christ, lying comfortably on their beds; Paul and Silas were spiritually alert, worshiping and praying regardless of circumstances.
- If we are spiritually awake, it will reflect in our constancy of prayer and worship.

—"praying and singing hymns to God":

- This is the third reference to prayer. At the place of prayer, God opened Lydia's heart to salvation; at the place of prayer, God delivered a young lady from physical and spiritual slavery; at the place of

prison, Paul and Silas made it into a place of prayer, sending physical and spiritual shockwaves throughout the prison.

- Do you want to plant churches? Pray. Do you want an effective mission? Pray. Has your mission been disrupted by pain? No it hasn't. Nothing can disrupt the mission of Christ. By God's grace, we can transform our prisons into places of prayer. When we do, God sends forth spiritual shockwaves that set the prisoners free.

—"suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken":

- The "great earthquake" reminds us of Acts 4:31, which also came in response to prayer: "*And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*"
- These earthquakes marked a spiritual shift that took place. In Acts 4, God shook up Jerusalem—physically and spiritually—through prayer and proclamation. In Acts 16, God shook a prison, and all Philippi, through prayer and proclamation.
- Prayer sends spiritual shockwaves through our city. Sometimes, it might even send physical shockwaves. Jack Deere tells of a time he was preaching on Acts 4 about an earthquake shaking the room, and right when he said the words, a literal earthquake occurred.
- Maybe all that shaking in OKC is something other than fracking? Just kidding. Checking to see if you're still reading.

—"immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened":

- Earlier, God liberated someone from physical and spiritual slavery. Now, he sends a physical and spiritual earthquake, and it sets free physical and spiritual prisoners.
- Jesus came to "proclaim liberty to the captives" and "set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). He does this physically and spiritually.
- We should not limit Christ's work to spiritual freedom. Christ does not merely proclaim spiritual salvation but total salvation. Our ministries should be marked by helping people find freedom in Christ: spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally, financially. Christ came to save you totally, not just partially.
- This is not to say we won't suffer after Christ saves us. Paul is a case in point. But even when we suffer, there is a deeper freedom that transcends.
- Christians should be setting free slaves to idolatry and prisoners of sin.
- What prison are you living in right now? How are you enslaved? The gospel is not just good news about going to heaven when you die. It is good news for this life too.

—"jailer... drew his sword... about to kill himself... supposed that the prisoners had escaped": the jailer's life was on the line. He deemed that death by suicide would have been preferable to the circus of torture the Romans would have destined him for.

—"Do not harm yourself!": Self-harm is rampant in our culture. Part of our Christian cry is, "Do not harm yourself!" Jesus gives us something to live for.

—"We are all here!":

- Despite being liberated, the prisoners remain! They were free but didn't flee. Why? They discerned the meaning of the earthquake. They did not dismiss it as a mere scientific reality. They connected it to the prayers of Paul and Silas. They were beginning to see that there's more freedom in a prison, if God is there, than anywhere else in the world. It's like when I got saved and thought, "I don't want to be anywhere else in the world than right here, right now."
- The prisoners had been "listening" (v. 25) to the prayer and worship of Paul and Silas. Perhaps the men prayed for supernatural rescue from prison when the earthquake "suddenly" broke open the prison doors.

—"trembling with fear":

- This is the fear of God. God's presence should make us tremble—always spiritually, and sometimes physically. "trembling" represents the humble awe we feel before a God who makes us feel delightfully small in His presence.

- So often we try to make ourselves “big”—to prove to the world that we matter. But God made us to delight in feeling small. We taste this reality when we stand before the vast Pacific, or a swirling tornado, or the Grand Canyon. We tremble with awe at our relative smallness, and it delights us. This is a taste of what we were made for.
- Stop trying to make yourself “big” in the eyes of others. Concentrate on the eye of Him who sees all, and be small. Delight yourself in His big-ness and your smallness.

—“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”:

- People rarely ask this out of the blue. It seems likely that Paul and Silas had been very open about sharing their faith, intermixed with all the praying and worshiping.
- It took a crisis to lead this man to the point of asking this question. People in crisis or transition are often more interested in hearing about Jesus.

—“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”

- Throughout Acts, people are told to convert using one or more of these three words: believe, repent, and be baptized. See commentary above for the relationship between each and conversion.
- To “believe” means more than “agree that certain facts are true,” although it is not less than that. As James says, “even the demons believe and tremble.” Demons believe facts about Jesus—the evil spirit in this passage recognizes who “the Most High God” is and the nature of the “salvation” He offers (v. 17). But no demon has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ to save it from sin, which is necessary to be saved.
- The Reformers talked about three elements of faith: *Notitia* (knowledge), *assensus* (assent), and *fiducia* (trust). The “knowledge” aspect refers to knowing the content of the gospel; the “assent” aspect refers to agreeing with the content you know; the “trust” aspect refers to personal reliance on a living Savior. In short, to “believe” means to know and agree with the facts of the gospel and to trust Jesus personally.

—“you and your household”:

- If someone asked you, “What must I do to be saved,” what are the chances you might say what Paul did—“Believe... you and your household.” Most of us would say believe. We might also say repent. But “household”?
- This reflects Paul’s missionary strategy. Rather than starting a big meeting and gathering people to it, he injected the gospel into existing communities—households or relational networks—which became churches.
- Household conversions in Acts: Cornelius (10:44-48); Lydia (16:14-18); Philippian jailer (16:30-34); Crispus (18:8).
- From the earliest pages of Scripture, God set His heart not only on individuals but households. He saved not just Noah, but Noah’s family; He saved not just Lot, but Lot’s family; He saved not just Rahab, but Rahab’s family.
- When God called Abram, He announced His plan to save “all the families of the earth” through him. God’s heart is for families.
- When Jesus called His disciples to preach the gospel, he exhorted them to find “persons of peace”—people who are hungry, hospitable, and influential. From these homes, the apostles would establish a home base for extending the gospel.
- As mentioned above, “household” in ancient cultures included a broader social network than most of us realize.
- We should make it our aim not only to win individuals but families and social networks to Christ. As a church of house churches, we are designed for this. When an individual comes to Christ, it is natural to explore how Christ might open the hearts of people in their network like He does throughout Scripture. These “networks” can become churches through discipleship.
- This should also encourage those of us who are praying for our families to know Jesus. There is no guarantee that everyone in our family will believe and follow Christ, *but they are in the “splash zone” of grace.*

—“And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house”: The “word of the Lord” is the gospel. They spoke it to the whole household, giving us a further glimpse into their missionary strategy. Reach networks, not just individuals.

—“washed their wounds... set food before them”:

- The jailer already displayed spiritual hunger. His ability to open his network to them shows his influence. Now he washes their wounds and feeds them, indicating his hospitality. Hunger, influence, and hospitality. If you find these three traits in someone, there’s a good chance that God will do more than convert someone through you. He just might plant a whole church through you!
- Chrysostom: “he washed them and was washed”.
- The jailer cleansed their wounds and was cleansed of his sin. The man who oversaw the prison was set free from his spiritual cell.

—“baptized at once”: Again, the pattern in Acts is that we baptize promptly because baptism consummates conversion. See comments above.

—“rejoiced”: believing in Jesus is not a dry agreement with facts; it results in great joy. To behold divine beauty is to know joy “inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8).

35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." 37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." 38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. 40 So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

—It is not wrong to defend yourself and your rights, if for a good cause.

—On the other hand, Jesus went to the slaughter like a silent lamb, refusing to defend Himself. He advised that we turn the other cheek. There is a place for not defending ourselves—if it will further the gospel.

—By defending his rights, Paul set the church up for success. The city magistrates would now think twice before persecuting Christians. His self-defense was for a good cause.

—When a Christian baker in Colorado gets sued to high heaven for not baking a cake that would transgress his conscience—a constitutional violation—his reason for defending himself goes beyond himself. It is for the sake of Christians everywhere who might suffer similar persecution. By receiving a favorable verdict from the Supreme Court, Christians can feel freedom across the land to uphold their conscience. Paul’s actions here reflect a similar approach.

—When deciding to defend ourselves legally, relationally, or otherwise, we must consider the impact for the kingdom. In 2 Cor. 10-12, Paul spends three chapters defending himself, but then he explains that his purpose is not for his own self or reputation or vain glory. His purpose is to maintain a voice in the lives of the Corinthians for their upbuilding (2 Cor. 12:19). In that sense, his “self-defense” is not really self-defense. It is for Christ’s sake.