

Stories of Grace **Acts 16:16-40**

The big picture of Acts 16 seems to be telling us this:

The grace of God comes to those who are undeserving, unworthy and at times, not even seeking.

The first story of grace in Acts 16 describes the first convert to Christianity in Europe. We looked at this last week – her name is Lydia. We saw that there's nothing compelling about her situation in life. She is not a person of influence. She is a woman in a male dominated society. She is a Jew in a Roman colony. She is marginalized by her culture.

However insignificant she may feel, God views her as very significant.

The second story of grace is the slave girl with the predictive spirit. The girl was right in what she announced. Paul and Silas were proclaiming the gospel – the way of salvation. Paul and Silas were servants or slaves of the Most High God. She's right about all of that.

However...the power behind her announcement was demonic. However powerless she may have been to change her life, God releases His power to remove the spirit which binds her.

The third story of grace is the jailer. According to Roman law, if a prisoner escaped, the jailer who was in charge of him was to be inflicted with the same penalty that was due to the prisoner. In this case, it looks like the jailer assumed that Paul and Silas were going to receive the death penalty. The jailer must be thinking he would rather take his own life than be tortured to death.

However hopeless the situation seemed to the jailer, not only is he set free from his fears, he is also set free to follow Jesus as Lord.

Two Side Notes in These Stories:

Please notice that Paul spoke directly to the evil spirit – not to the girl but to the spirit. Further notice that Paul claimed the authority of Jesus. The risen Lord Jesus. Jesus who triumphed over the devil and all demonic forces through the cross and resurrection. See Colossians 2:15.

It's possible for Christians to live as if they are defeated. Life's circumstances can certainly lead you to feel that way but realize this.....Jesus has already won! Jesus has defeated your greatest enemies – death and the devil. Jesus has won and Jesus invites you to share in His victory!

The expression of faith displayed by Paul and Silas is in the context of suffering. Your circumstance of going through a personal struggle or suffering or some type of hard time is an opportunity to demonstrate the depth of your faith. It's one thing to have faith during good times. It's a work of God to maintain faith in God during hard times. Years later, Paul would write

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. Romans 5:3-4 (ESV)

Home Group Questions:

1. Of the three grace stories Pastor Karl mentioned on Sunday, all three were marginalized in some way. All three received powerful demonstrations of the grace of God. We know with certainty that two of them became Christians. Please discuss in your groups, which of those three do you feel most closely connected to?
2. Grace story #1 featured Lydia. You may have heard Pastor Karl describe the character, Lydia. Evidently, she was not significant in the Roman culture at Philippi, being a Jew and a woman. Do you understand your significance as a Christian? Do you feel significant?
3. Grace story #2 featured a clash of spiritual power. Paul demonstrates his spiritual authority by rebuking the spirit which enabled the slave girl to predict things. Do you understand your spiritual authority? An easy way to look at your spiritual authority is the authority you have to pray in Jesus' name. Do you know that you can ask God to act on your behalf because you come to Him in the name of Jesus?
4. Grace story #3 featured the jailer. He reached a moment where he was desperate and without hope. In his desperation, he called out, "What must I do to be saved?" Notice he was asking about *doing* and not *believing*... What must I **do**? When did you first come to understand that you need to believe in Jesus and not do a list of things to somehow satisfy God?
5. Is this display of grace in Acts 16 surprising to you in any way? Comforting?
6. Discuss in your group what is different about you or how God is changing you as a follower of Jesus.