

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Life for women in the first century was difficult. Defined by the men in their lives, women in the Roman Empire were valued mainly as wives and mothers - to produce children, remain chaste, and do household chores. Women were looked upon as second class citizens. No woman had the right to exchange her religion for another apart from her husband. Women were not allowed to be active in politics, so nobody wrote about them. Neither were women taught how to write, so they could not tell their own stories. A woman's freedom depended on her wealth and her social status. A few women ran businesses – like Lydia who we met in my last sermon. Lydia was the wealthy business woman from Thyatira in Asia Minor. A dealer in an expensive purple cloth, she was a success story in a world that rarely allowed women to be successful. Lydia longed for more than material wealth and, after hearing the gospel from Paul in Philippi, she became a follower of Jesus. The writer of Acts, Dr. Luke, emphasized in his gospel Jesus's special concern for women, children and families. Luke describes Jesus acting contrary to custom and culture by helping and healing women and accepting them as his followers (Luke 8:1-3; 13:10-17; 24:1-12). Jewish Morning Prayers (Birkhot Ha-shachar) included the prayer: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who did not make me a Gentile, a slave or a woman." Luke took that prayer, which excluded people of undesirable ethnicity, class and gender, to structure his account of Paul's ministry in Philippi. Luke describes the conversion story of three excluded people - a woman, a slave girl and a Roman (Gentile) prison guard who each discovered their true value and their real worth in Jesus Christ. Acts 16, with its three conversion cameos, asks readers this question: "Who controls your life?" Lydia controlled her fashion business but only Jesus had power to open her heart to forgive her. A Roman jailer controlled Paul and Silas in their cell, but he could not control an huge earthquake. A slave girl was under the control of her masters - human and demonic - and needed freedom. As the gospel entered Europe, God began to change a society that dominated and discriminated against women and girls. Travelling with Luke, a Gentile, and ministering to women in a Roman city, Paul understood that "Jesus Christ opened the privileges of faith equally to men and women" (Dr. Charles Ryrie). Women from every place and every race find their real identity and true dignity in Jesus. Who needed to hear that message of freedom more than female slaves who were at the mercy of predatory masters, like the slave girl who Paul encountered by the river in Philippi in 50AD.

As Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, again went to the riverside prayer meeting where the Lord had previously opened Lydia's heart, on the way Paul **'met a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future...she earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortunetelling'** (16:16).

Literally, the girl was 'filled with the spirit of python' (*pneuma pythona*). In Greek mythology, a python was said to guard the priestess in the village of Pytho at the foot of Mount Parnassus. Legend says the god Apollo killed the python to gain its powers of predicting the future which were spoken through a woman called the Oracle of Delphi. People from all over Greece came to

have their questions about the future answered by the Oracle. Her cryptic answers were used to determine when farmers should plant a crop or when a king should declared war on an enemy. The slave girl was exploited by her owners to make them money. Behind their greed lay demons. In Philippi, people lived in fear and walked in darkness because *“the prince of the power of the air, the spirit [was] at work in the sons of disobedience”* (Eph 2:1-2). Into the darkness, God sent *“the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ”* (2 Cor 4:4b). When God comes to save, Satan seeks to deceive. Luke describes the slave girl ***‘followed Paul shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved’*** (16: 18). Was the girl telling the truth? Paul and his party were servants of the Most High God = God of Israel “El Elyon”. They did proclaim the way of salvation! Our great need is to be saved by God, but notice Satan’s subtlety. Demons speak with human voices: *“in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons”* (1 Timothy 4:1). The slave girl was correct, but Paul discerned danger in her words. In Philippi, people might listen to the clairvoyant and that think she was part of Paul’s group. Worse, they might think that there was no difference at all between the python god Apollo and the Savior Jesus. Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). His tricky method is to try to blend and mix God’s gospel message with demonic mantras. It is through words, and the ideas and philosophies behind those words, that Satan works his evil. A prominent radio announcer who lives in a same-sex relationship said on Friday that her children will celebrate Mother’s Day calling their parents ‘Mum’ and ‘Mummy’. The two “mothers” have even renamed Father’s Day as “Donor Day.” In his novel, “The Last Battle,” C.S. Lewis describes Narnian dwarfs being deceived into following the demonic Carlomen god called Tash by repeating the mantra: *“Tash is Aslan, Aslan is Tash.”* Deceptive *‘Python is Paul, Paul is Python’* mantras blur the lines between belief and heresy today, such as: **‘All paths lead to God!’ ‘Right and wrong are relative!’ ‘Love is love.’** Do you believe those subtle messages? Satan is the Father of lies and the author of confusion. Satan will speak as much of the truth as is necessary to distort the truth! If Satan could make the Philippians believe there was no difference at all between Python and Paul, he would have achieved a greater deception than if the slave girl simply opposed Paul outright ***“She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so troubled.”*** Paul didn’t act immediately. *“The girl’s cries may not have seemed dangerous at first; indeed there is no suggestion that she was hostile to the missionaries. But it became clear to Paul that she was in the grip of an evil spirit, and he proceeded to exorcise the spirit by means of the name of Jesus”* (I. Howard Marshall, Acts, 269). Paul turned and said to the spirit in her, ***“In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!”*** ***At that moment the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities”*** (16:18-19). Luke used humor. Literally, ***“The Spirit and the profit went out.”*** The words **‘left’** (‘spirit left her’) and **‘gone’** (‘money was gone’) are the same Greek word. The spirit went out of the girl and the profits went out of their pockets. The slave girl was freed from her bondage to men and from their money also. Paul invoked the name of Jesus because Satan, sin, and death must bow before the Son of God. When the seventy disciples found demons subject to them, Jesus responded: ***‘I saw Satan fall...I give you authority’*** (Luke 10:18). We are free in Jesus’ Name. By his power we proclaim freedom to others. *“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). The first two Christians in Europe as recorded by Dr. Luke were a businesswoman and a slave girl. Both were freed from darkness by coming into the Light. Are you bound? Christ offers his victory. Are you in darkness? Receive Christ’s light. Are you afraid? Christ offers you his peace.