

26. How the West was Won

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[0 : 0 0] Well, turn with me, if you would, to the passage that we read in Acts chapter 16, and it'll help you to have that in front of you as we study it together. It's the story, in fact, of how the West was won, but not the way the Westerns portray it.

I think you can see the map there of the northwest tip of Turkey is where Europe and Asia are separated by just a few hundred meters of water in the Bosphorus Straits at Istanbul, Old Byzantium, and a little to the southwest by the Hellespont Straits, what we call the Dardanelles.

It's an area with a long history, of course, of wars and invasions because of the vital geography of the sea routes between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The drama of the Trojan Wars took place all around that area.

In fact, that's where Troas gets its name from, ancient Troy. And, of course, during World War I, the disastrous Dardanelles campaign, or Gallipoli, as the Australians and New Zealanders call it, something etched very deeply into their national psyches, remembered every year on Anzac Day.

You can read about it in the history books. But our text today, in leading us to Troas, which lies just opposite those ill-fated Gallipoli beaches, our text invites us to ponder a far more significant invasion than any of these.

[1 : 4 0] The invasion of the continent of Europe with the Gospel of Christ. Of course, in those days there was no sense really of it being separate continents.

It was all part of the Roman Empire. It was all one. But these critical chapters that we're studying now in Acts do describe a huge shift of the arena as the Gospel crosses over into Macedonia and Achaia, into ancient Greece, and for the very first time into the world of truly Western culture.

And the effects of that invasion are still all around us today because they change the whole world forever. That journey from Troas to Philippi is perhaps the most important sea journey ever made in the history of man.

Far greater impact on the world than Columbus' journey, or Magellan, or Vasco da Gama, or any of these others, because it was the beginning of how the Western world was won for the Gospel of Christ.

Now, of course, that great invasion wasn't in Paul's mind when he set off to encourage those churches of Turkey, of Galatia, with Silas and Timothy. But it was in God's mind. And it was all part of his plan and purpose.

[3 : 0 1] And that's what makes it so interesting and indeed so exciting for us, knowing what we know now, just to see how it all came about then. So how does the risen Lord lead his church into making such a great new advance for his eternal kingdom?

An advance that will change the world forever, that has momentous consequences, not just for history, but for eternity. How does he do it? Well, that's what Luke wants us to see here, wants us to have certainty about.

That's why the Holy Spirit has preserved all these words in our Bibles for us. Because we are still caught up in just the same worldwide advance of the Gospel of Christ as began that day.

And Paul, Luke, and the Holy Spirit, they all want us to know that God is at work, marvelously, doing great things of eternal significance, even though at the time his servants might be very strangely perplexed.

They might face even great persecution. They might have to endure great pain. And their journey of obedience may indeed lead them to jail, but even so, it will also lead to joy, to great rejoicing in the God who turns evil on its head and who brings great blessing to his church and through it to the whole world.

[4 : 33] So let's look then at this long story and try to summarize it. First, verses 6 to 15 that speak of a perplexity that leads to a vital journey for the Gospel.

What Luke is telling us is that sometimes God closes doors very perplexingly for his servants and yet through that opens other great doors very marvelously for his Gospel.

So, verse 6 tells us that after they'd left Darby and Lystra, Paul and Silas went west into the province of Asia, probably making, no doubt, for the capital, Ephesus.

But, verse 6, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach there. How so? Well, we're not told. There's no mention of any special guidance or any visions or anything like that.

There may have been that. But I think it's more likely that perhaps something else happened. Perhaps Paul got ill. Perhaps their travel was frustrated. Perhaps there was just a whole list of things that conspired together to stop them going where they wanted to go.

[5 : 42] And so they concluded that God was closing the door there. You'll remember back in chapter 15, they concluded, after a lot of discussion and thinking, that what they'd come up with at the Jerusalem Council was clearly from the Holy Spirit.

And I've no doubt it was something similar here. So instead, verse 7, they decided to go north into Bithynia, the part of the territory just bordering the Black Sea up near the Bosphorus.

But again, no. The Spirit of Jesus didn't allow them. No doubt as to who this is. And that must have been greatly perplexing for them.

Certainly nothing like that had ever happened before. And they knew, didn't they, that God had commanded them specifically to go everywhere preaching the Gospel. And remember, of course, that all of this is now in retrospect.

It's easy to see later that God was closing doors and redirecting them in the Spirit, but it was not necessarily at all easy to see that at the time. And it must have been very puzzling, very perplexing.

[6 : 47] They're keen as mustard to be about the mission of the Gospel, but the doors just keep on closing in their face, slamming shut. Well, they don't give up.

They don't wait and do nothing until some special guidance comes. They know very clearly that their job is to speak the Word, so they just change direction again. And this time they go northwest in the direction of the Aegean Sea to Troas, to the region of ancient Troy.

And there at last, with the tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula, right opposite them in view, mainland Europe, just across the water, at last it all becomes clear.

Verse 9. Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia calling out, come over to Macedonia and help us. Well, who was he?

Well, again, we don't know. It's possible, possible that it was Luke himself, the writer. He may well have been a citizen of Greece, perhaps of Philippi.

[7 : 50] And he'd moved to Troas, where he met Paul. If you look carefully, you'll see in verse 10, Luke seems to have joined Paul's journey here.

Luke's chapter, in verse 6, he speaks about them going through the region of Phrygia and so on. But at verse 10, it's we, from now on, journeying to Philippi.

So perhaps it was a bit like Peter and Cornelius, do you remember, where God gave them both a vision, but then later they actually came face to face with each other. We don't know.

But what we do know is that when they had put all this together with the doors that had closed and these various other places, they concluded, says verse 10, clearly, that God had called them not at this time to preach in Asia, but to go across the water into Greece and preach there.

So off they went, by sea, via the little island of Samothracee and on to mainland Macedonia and to its leading city, Philippi. A vital journey for the future of the gospel of Christ.

[9 : 00] There wasn't a great encouragement in that. We're just God's servants, aren't we? We don't know everything that he has planned and purposed for our lives, much less for the whole of history.

Just as foot soldiers in an individual battalion don't know the full scope of the general's battle plans for the whole invasion or the war. We don't know, but we can obey the orders that God's plan has clearly revealed to us.

And we can trust, can't we, that he's very much under control. And we may be greatly perplexed at times. Everything may seem to be going completely off plan as far as we're concerned.

But perplexity for us doesn't mean that everything is going wrong. In fact, in God's strategy, it often will be very perplexing for us. It often will be a story of all kinds of doors closing, sometimes very painfully, on our own plans and purposes and ambitions, sometimes for reasons that we just can't fathom at the time.

Sometimes we'll never fathom them in this life. And sometimes we find ourselves heading in a direction that we'd never planned ourselves and maybe we're still very unsure of, but God is in control just as he was here, perfectly, despite all of these closed doors on their ambitions.

[10 : 32] And I've noticed that it wasn't clear then to Paul. It's quite the reverse, even though it became clear in God's good time. And many of us can testify to examples of that kind of thing in our own lives, can't we?

I certainly can myself. After I had trained for ministry and done my assistantships, I find a time when one door after another was just simply slamming shut in my face, sometimes very painfully.

Ambitions that I most definitely had and things that my heart were in were just closed off as possibilities to me as I was looking to find a church to minister in. And instead, God turned my whole direction around and sent me to one place I never expected to go was right down to the south of England.

And coming from Scotland, that seemed to be a bit of a punishment to me at the time. But that journey opened doors far more strategic and far more joyful for my own future ministry than I could ever have imagined.

In fact, it's only because of that journey that most of our church staff are here today. Alex and Agnes, myself, Edward and Bob, all of that. All of that would have never happened and neither would the Cornhill Training Course if I hadn't been pushed away from the doors that I wanted to open and sent away to ones very perplexed that I'd never dreamed of opening.

[11 : 57] And it seemed very perplexing to me then. But now, I can look back and I can say, well, it was the Spirit of Jesus. Maybe you've experienced something like that. Or maybe you will.

Well, take heart. So did Paul experience something like that? But God knew what he was doing. And he knows what he's doing even when often his servants seem very perplexed and can't understand.

Well, I'm sure Paul was still pretty perplexed when he reached Macedonia. After all, what could a Jew from Tarsus do to help the Macedonians? That ancient Greek culture represented, as one writer puts it, the highest and the most glorious flowering of the human spirit that has ever been known in the history of man.

It represented the highest and the very best in learning and in philosophy and in culture and in the arts and in knowledge. It was the home, ancient Greece, of everything that was truly great.

It was the pinnacle of Western culture. What kind of health does Western culture so badly, so desperately need? That's still a pretty pertinent question today, isn't it?

[13 : 13] Well, Paul did not have any doubts about that verse 10. What they needed when he went there was exactly what every other culture needed. They needed the preaching of the gospel.

It may take us time to find out where it is the Lord wants us to minister, but there is absolutely no doubt of what it is he wants us to minister. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is what every culture needs from the most primitive to the most advanced.

So, they head for Philippi, they head for this Roman city. It's a city, by the way, where Mark Antony defeated Julius Caesar's murderers, Cassius and Brutus, in 42 BC.

This isn't fiction we're reading about, this is real history, historical place. And in Philippi, it seems that there was no synagogue there. You needed 10 Jewish men to form a synagogue.

Perhaps there wasn't even that. But they assumed that there would be a place of prayer down by the river. That was the custom in foreign places. Do you remember Psalm 137? By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion, the temple, the exiled Jews.

[14 : 24] And I guess as they went there, it didn't seem like an awful lot to show for that great sea journey. Just a few women. But God doesn't need much to start great things.

And verse 14 tells us that God had gone before them. There was a wealthy woman there named Lydia who'd come in the past to Philippi, come from Thyatira. She had a cloth business.

Presumably, I guess she was now a widow because she seemed to be the head of the household. She'd come from Thyatira across an Asia Minor, a city where there'd been many Jews and it seems that there she had come to know the true knowledge of God seeking Him in the Hebrew Scriptures.

And now, verse 14 says, when at last she hears the good news of the Messiah, God opens her heart to pay attention, to receive what Paul is preaching.

It was everything she'd been taught to long for, to wait for. And now her heart was just opening like a flower to the sun. It's wonderful. She said, yes, praise God, the Messiah has come.

[15 : 36] My hope in His Word has been fulfilled. It's a wonderful picture. It's like Simeon and Anna, remember, that Luke tells us at the beginning of his Gospel in the temple were waiting for the salvation of God promised and they received it with joy as He opened their hearts.

It was so gentle, it was so simple in Lydia's life. No drama, nothing at all. It's rather like John Wesley testifying to how he sat in that Oldersgate Chapel and as he heard Luther's preface to the book of Romans being read, his heart was strangely warmed.

And that was the beginning of a mighty and powerful ministry for Christ. So simple and gentle, Lydia's heart just being opened.

But here is the birth of the very first Christian household in the whole of the continent of Europe. Verse 15, she's baptized and as head of her household. All of her household are baptized too.

All her dependents and family and servants. And it's the beachhead of a great strategic movement of the Spirit of God and the Gospel of the Kingdom.

[16 : 47] But notice, it is a great and strategic moment but it's not in any way an impersonal thing. It's about people. It's about families. That's who matters to God and look at what length our God goes to to reach such families.

Lydia had been moved by God years before perhaps to Philippi and then Paul had been hedged in north and south and driven west and driven across the sea by God to get to that one place to find that tiny little group of women at prayer that that household might become a gospel household.

Quietly and gently her heart was opened to Christ and her home was opened to Christ. She prevailed on them to use everything that she had for the sake of Christ and through that a whole continent was opened to the gospel of Christ.

This was the birth of the Philippine church we're witnessing here. A church that above all from the very beginning funded and supported Paul's ongoing mission in the rest of Europe.

And we can see that now says Luke even though Paul didn't see all of that then. How could he? But all those doors were closing in his face when he was perplexed and frustrated with all these knockbacks in his ministry.

[18 : 15] So friends if that is what you're facing right now in your own life doors closing and knockbacks in your Christian walk and in your Christian witness take heart. Doors closing in God's economy can often mean great doors opening.

Perplexity and discouragement may well be propelling you on a vital journey for the sake of the gospel of Christ. You just don't know. We need to move on.

Verses 11 to 14 speak about sorry 11 to 24 speak about persecution that leads to vicious jail for the sake of the gospel.

Luke's point here is that often when doors do begin to open wonderfully for the gospel other doors in this case prison doors may close very viciously on God's servants.

It was about his ministry in Ephesus that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 16 verse 9 a wide and effective door is opened and there are many adversaries. But it's a pattern that we've seen time and again and that's what we see right here.

[19 : 30] It's a remarkable parallel verse 16 and following with the pattern in the gospels where the presence of the Lord Jesus himself seemed to draw out right into the open the powers of darkness and indeed that is an abiding pattern that Jesus himself teaches us to expect too.

Remember he says wherever the seed of the gospel word is sown expect the enemy expect the sons of the evil one to be there to try and destroy. It says that in a parable in Matthew 13.

And the greater the work for Christ the greater and more focused and ferocious will be the opposition. Now I've no doubt that Paul was not yet fully aware of the strategic importance of this first foray into Europe.

It was great I'm sure to see Lydia's conversion but so far there didn't seem to be an awful lot more to show. And then this slave girl starts taunting them over and over and over and crying out and following them.

She had a spirit of divination literally she had a serpent spirit a python spirit that represented the oracle the serpent oracle at the temple of Delphi where many of ancient Greeks sought guidance and wisdom about the future.

[20 : 47] By the way that's just an intimation isn't it of the moral bankruptcy of that great flowering culture for all the high learning for all the high philosophy for all that great culture people still flock to fortune tellers and to mumbo jumbo merchants to find out about the future.

Not that different today either is it? It's often the very wealthy and otherwise intelligent people who seem to spend vast sums of money on all kinds of nonsense about guidance and life coaching and all that sort of thing.

Nothing much has changed. I know that there were a lot of charlatans at work in the ancient Greece of that day but behind it all was a real spirit of falsehood and lies.

And Luke is very plain. This girl was controlled by a demon. And just like in the Gospels it cried out the true identity of Christ and his followers as if to show its would-be superiority over them or his place alongside them as of equal worth.

And understandably Paul was so troubled and distressed by this not annoyed that's not a good translation he was distressed and troubled so he commanded the demon to come out and instantly that very hour it came out.

[22 : 07] There was no great ritual of exorcism here by the way not like the films not like some of the so-called bizarre Christian exorcisms you get nothing like that just a word in Jesus' name.

Why did he do that? And surely he knew the risks of the kind of consequences that would be unleashed as they were. Well no doubt for the honour of the Lord Jesus' name.

Paul did not want in any way the gospel of the truth to be associated with occultism with fortune-telling with people seeking a better life for themselves with people seeking property and gain and health and wealth.

That's an important lesson for us as Christians. Real Christianity the real gospel wants absolutely nothing to do with any of that kind of health and wealth and prosperity teaching.

That's not Christian that's the mark of paganism. So he had concern for the honour of Christ's name but also no doubt sheer compassion for this poor girl a slave shut in spiritually imprisoned by that spirit but also shut in and imprisoned physically by these exploitative masters.

[23 : 19] No doubt they abused her in all kinds of other shameful ways as well. But the result was very predictable. Verse 18 as the spirit came out immediately he uses that phrase twice so also verse 19 the men saw that their source of profit had come out.

Same word again. And they were furious that they dragged them to the magistrates. Of course they're not honest when they take them to the magistrates. They don't say these men have healed this girl of their demon.

Of course they don't. Nor do they say to the magistrates well we've lost a lot of money we've lost our Christmas bonus because of these men. I'm sure there were men who made a lot of money and they probably weren't too popular for it.

There wouldn't have been much sympathy for that just as there's not much sympathy for bankers losing their Christmas bonuses today. No they don't do that but they do what all nasty exploiters do.

They play to the crowd. In fact verse 20 they play the race card. These dirty Jews are wrecking our city they say. These Jews are ruining our business.

[24 : 23] These Jews are threatening our wealth. Well that's eerily familiar isn't it? They play the foreign race card.

Again verse 21 these foreigners they're infecting our culture with all their foreign ways. They're destroying our economy. They're destroying our communities with their dirty foreign ways.

But we're Romans. Well we all know there's nothing like a bit of nationalist tub thumping to get the riffraff and the crowd on your side. We shouldn't be surprised at that.

Well it's common enough and not for the first time vested interests manipulate and unite with the state authorities in the perversion of justice to violently suppress the Christian gospel.

A gospel that refuses to be private and just personal but a gospel that actually impacts the real world and brings about change in people's lives and people's behavior. And so Paul and Silas are beaten up viciously unlawfully and they're jailed with instructions for maximum discomfort and vicious treatment.

[25 : 35] Verse 24 they're put in the inner prison and their feet in the stocks. Well again nothing much has changed. There's great toleration isn't there in Western culture for any version of Christianity that will give you nice things like cherubic looking choir boys singing Christmas carols in funny robes.

We're very happy with that sort of thing. very happy with feeble vicars like on dad's army where all they do is drink tea and look pathetic. But there is much less acceptance for a gospel that actually changes lives.

It challenges communities. It ruins the businesses of people who trade on vice and exploitation and superstition. They say you know that the great awakening of the 18th century was a disaster for businesses in many towns and ports because many many drinking dens and brothels and all sorts of other unsavory places just got closed down.

They lost their custom. No wonder the evangelists of those days were hated by the businessmen of the day. The world will always persecute those who preach a gospel that is a real threat to their culture and a real threat to their pockets.

Of course it will. even if it's people seeking to help the very weakest and the most exploited in society.

[27 : 00] Often they are publicly abused. Just look at those who seek to help the unborn child, the weakest, the most easy to exploit in the whole of our society. Hated by the public at large today.

And many Christians too as we were praying in many parts of the world. Persecuted for seeking to convert others to Christ in ways that truly change their lives. Well here you see is a truly dangerous gospel at work in Paul and Silas' mission.

It is a culture conquering gospel. And of course the powers of darkness knows that. This is the D-Day landings of Christianity on the shores of Europe which over the next 20 centuries was going to become the hub of mission to the whole of the rest of the world.

So it's no wonder that this huge backlash erupts against God's purposes and his servants. A wide and effective door is opening up for generations to come and inevitably there will be many adversaries.

My father put it this way, those who challenge the kingdom of darkness may expect leading backs. And here's the point you see, Luke is telling us God often allows that.

[28 : 25] He allows his servants even physical bondage, to lose their physical liberty for a time so that those in spiritual bondage may be liberated forever. However, we're not told specifically that this slave girl was converted but I think Luke means us to see that.

But regardless of her own particular situation, this is God at work, breaking new ground, advancing his glorious kingdom despite what seems to be great perplexity, all kinds of doors closing and even prison doors closing on his people.

And yet, God is calling the tune. Don't make any mistake about that. He is gloriously sovereign even in the midst of this. Indeed, it's the very hallmark of the way he works.

As the last section shows us so clearly, verses 25 to 40, all about the pain that leads to vibrant joy in the gospel in that prison.

Sometimes, God does close doors perplexingly for his people and open larger doors for the gospel. Often, when these larger doors of blessing do open for the gospel, they will lead to vicious opposition and even persecution, even prison.

[29 : 41] But listen, always, always, when enemies seem to be closing the door on God's plan and purposes, we shall see their cause absolutely and utterly frustrated and God's great victory bursting forth like glorious day.

Not always immediately, but always nonetheless. What did Paul write years later to the very church at Philippi about his imprisonment in Rome in chapter one of his letter?

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. And in chapter three of that letter he talks about knowing the power of Christ's resurrection even as he shares in Christ's sufferings.

Well, there was one man, at least in that church, who knew very well the truth of all that in his own experience about the pain and the suffering of Paul leading to the vibrant joy of gospel grace in his own life and in that of his household.

Yes, of course, the Philippian jailer. But the pain of Paul and Silas had already brought forth joy, says verse 25.

[30 : 53] Joyous prayer and singing to God. They were praying and singing to him in the middle of the night. They weren't praying for relief and release. It was a joyous praise. They were rejoicing to be counted worthy of the sufferings of Christ.

And there was joy in knowing that the sovereign Lord who had hedged their way from Philippi right from the very start was clearly in charge and was clearly on the march even though that they were in prison.

You see, they knew far better than we so often seem to know that it's just when the enemy thinks he's got the upper hand that God will turn the tables on him and utterly frustrate him and marvelously glorify his own name.

And he does right here in the middle of that maximum security prison. For a start, the prisoners are being evangelized as they listen to Paul and Silas singing. No doubt the jailer was too so that when that earthquake suddenly opened all the doors and broke all their bonds, they knew that it was the intervention of these men's God.

And the poor jailer was terrified, verse 27. He was about to kill himself with the fright and the fear of what might happen. But when he heard a shout from Paul saying, no, no, no, we're all here, verse 29, he rushed in straight to Paul and Silas, fell down in front of them.

[32 : 15] He sensed the power and the presence of God was in the place with them. He knew that only these men could tell him what to do. What must I do to be saved, he says?

How do I come to terms with a God whose ambassadors can sing for joy after a beating and with their feet in the stocks? And how do I come to terms with a God who can bring earthquakes like this to save his servants?

Now, in case you think all of this is just far-fetched, let me tell you it's far from unique. This sudden encounter with the living God that changes people forever.

Sometimes it happens just like that. Sometimes it's like Lydia, gently opening her heart in somebody who's been prepared for years. But sometimes God just reaches down from heaven to earth and grabs hold of somebody and shakes them violently and draws them into his kingdom.

John Wesley was like Lydia. It was a gentle warming of the heart. John Newton, it was quite different. God reached out in the middle of a storm at sea and dragged him into the kingdom of Christ, just like that.

[33 : 28] There are people who have come to Christ in this very church because they've been walking up Buchanan Street and they've heard the bell ringing and something has compelled them to come in.

And there and then the Lord Jesus Christ has appeared to them and spoken to them and dragged them into his kingdom. And times in church history have told of extraordinary things that have happened.

I could tell you stories of the late 1950s, when my father was minister in a small fishing village in Gardenson in the northeast of Scotland. A time of extraordinary awakening was present.

People sometimes were walking up the street, hard-bitten fishermen who had never been in church in their lives and they were struck to the ground on their knees just like that and led by people gibbering to the door of his house, banging on the door saying, tell me what to do to be saved.

Many of them are still alive. Some of them visit us in this church here. And that was the jailer. What must I do, he said. And verse 31, Paul said, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

[34 : 41] He spoke the word to him and all in his house and he did believe right there and then and he was saved right there and then and there was more rejoicing, verse 34. He rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Again, they were all baptized. The second Christian household in Europe. And again, immediately they set about serving the servants of Christ.

Verse 33, washing their wounds and verse 44, serving them food. Was there ever such a night of joy in such a miserable place as that prison?

Very different quarters, no doubt, from Lydia's West End address, but the same joy and the same Lord. But just think about this. What other way to that joy could there have been for that jailer and his household than through all the pain and the imprisonment of Paul and Silas?

How else would the gospel penetrate a house right in the midst of a horrible prison compound? Isn't there something of a pattern, a hallmark of God's working here?

[35 : 57] Here's a man and a family deep in that prison house, a place of misery, of violence, of darkness. And yet God sent his servants right in there to bring them the grace and the mercy and the salvation of God through beatings and abuse and bleeding backs and feet in the stocks.

books. What kind of a terrible God would ask his servants to do that, to pay that price for the sake of a man who no doubt himself was hardened and brutal and cynical and as rough as they came, the lowest of the low.

It won't surprise you to know that Roman jailers were hardly known for their cultural finesse. What kind of God would send good men after bad like that?

Well, of course, the God who himself, the person of his beloved son, left behind the glorious joy and liberty of heaven and came down to the horror and the darkness and the cynicism of our world, to be despised and rejected and beaten and abused and imprisoned and put to death, even death on a cross, the lowest of the low, a criminal's death.

death so as to reach out to those living in the darkness of death and under the curse of sin and to bring them the light and the joy of life eternal, of life in all its fullness, of life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[37 : 35] You see a pattern? There too, in the apparent defeat, in the apparent triumph of evil as Jesus died on the cross, right there in fact death was where the greatest ever victory was won.

Pain and persecution and even death itself led to the vibrant joy of salvation for multitudes who deserve nothing, nothing at all.

You see, friends, when the devil seems to have the upper hand. Fear not. God is at work. And he was, bringing victory to his name.

And here also, bringing vindication to his servants. Just as Jesus was vindicated by his resurrection, so Paul and Silas here are publicly vindicated here. Verses 35 to 40 tell us that they were brought out in great vindication.

It's something like a resurrection. They had been wronged, they'd been treated unjustly and illegally. They'd accepted it meekly for the sake of Christ. But meekness is not the same as weakness.

[38 : 47] And there is a time to assert legal rights publicly. And the gospel is at stake. And that's what they did here in verse 37. You've assaulted Roman citizens without trial and so we will not go quietly, they said.

And in doing so, you see, they were ensuring proper behavior towards the Christians, towards the church that they left behind them. Because that is what they left behind them in Philippi.

Not just a few converts, but a church, a living fellowship. Verse 40 says, they went to visit the brothers, the brethren, the fellowship of God's people. And notice, right from the very start, it was a church of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, male and female, all one in Christ Jesus.

The church for whom Paul said when he wrote to them later that he gave thanks in all his prayers because of their partnership in the gospel with them from the very beginning. From the day when God's spirit began by opening hearts, which led to open homes, which led to a whole open continent for the gospel of Jesus.

Friends, that is still how the risen Lord Jesus Christ is opening up new advances for his kingdom. Sometimes his servants are greatly perplexed. Sometimes they are persecuted.

[40 : 12] Sometimes even they are imprisoned. It is never easy winning people or places to the Lord Jesus Christ. But that shouldn't surprise us. We're following in the path of a crucified Savior.

But don't forget, each journey that begins with perplexity and which may go on through much pain will end always, always, in great joy.

For he who was crucified is risen and he is Lord. So let me conclude with some words Paul wrote just a few years later to the church at Corinth.

We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.

[41 : 47] For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. eternal. Let's pray.

Lord, your ways are often deeply perplexing and even painful to us. But we know you are the God who does all things well.

We thank you for those who endured such things that the gospel might come to Europe and indeed to these islands' shores. We pray that we also would be willing to follow in the path of a crucified Savior to see the life of resurrection joy filling the hearts of many.

For we ask it in his name. Amen.