

# The Gospel keeps the Spotlight on God

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[ 0 : 00 ] I just want to say what a privilege it is to meet up again with Doug and Ann Johnson. I stayed with them. They were host and hostess to me twice in London.

And I'm sure they would be just as gracious a host and hostess to you if you went to see them in Kenya. So I would urge you to do that.

Now sometimes when we read a passage of Scripture, we need to take a closer look than maybe we're accustomed to doing. And perhaps when it's a familiar passage like the one tonight.

Eugene Peterson, I think it was, had a friend who did photographs of common, ordinary, sometimes simple and sometimes ugly things, ordinary objects and would magnify them.

And Peterson said you would see things there that you never thought you would see before. For instance, now it's a problem, culture gap here.

[ 1 : 03 ] I don't know if you call them brillo pads or not. We have brillo pads. It's like a steel wool thing with soap in it. Well, he said his friend had a photograph of a highly magnified brillo pad.

And you don't put those on display in your kitchen. You hide them under the sink or something like that. You don't think of them as objects of beauty du jour or something like that.

But this had a real aesthetic appeal. He said when you saw it magnified, it was one of the most beautiful of kitchen items. He said there's a swirl of fine wire that's so pleasing to the eye.

And the colors of blue fade in and out of the soap film. And you wouldn't normally see that unless you took a really close, magnified look at it. Now, sometimes I think biblical narratives are like that, like the one we have tonight in the New Testament.

We can look at this as part of the story of the early church. This is the second missionary journey of Paul, etc., etc. We know the story about the earthquake and the non-jail break and all of that and so on.

[ 2 : 17 ] But you need to look, I think, more at what's the significance of this story. And of course, where I keep coming back again and again is that in Scripture, God conspires for His own glory.

In other words, the Gospel, the Scripture puts the spotlight on God. So when you're reading Scripture, you say, what's this telling me and revealing to me about God?

What's God saying to me about Himself? And I think the passage is rich with teaching. So we want to look at that. If the Gospel always keeps the spotlight on God, what does the spotlight fall on in Acts 16?

Well, first of all, you see that the twist of God's providence, and when I say providence, I'm not trying to use a big word. I just mean God's interesting, unguessable way He has of providing for His people and His kingdom.

But the twist of God's providence is so baffling. Verses 6 through 10, if you look there, and you notice in your text that Paul received a no from the Holy Spirit about going to the West in verse 6.

[ 3 : 34 ] And when it means speak the word in Asia, it probably means to the West of where he was at the time, going on toward Ephesus, what we maybe call Asia Minor or Turkey today and so on. And he got a no.

How did the Spirit indicate that to him? I don't know. Ask somebody who does. But the Holy Spirit had forbidden them to go west into Asia toward Ephesus at that time.

So they go north. And they get another no in verse 7. They came into Mycenae and so on, and they attempted to go into Bithynia, go up in the area around the Black Sea, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

How did they know that? I don't know, but they knew. Another no. So passing by Mycenae, they went down to Troas. Now Troas is on the east shore of the Aegean Sea.

It's at the land bridge of two continents. And so it's there, verses 9 and 10, that Paul has this vision of a man of Macedonia, saying, come over into Macedonia, that is over in northern Greece, I suppose, to us and so on.

[ 4 : 43 ] But come over into Macedonia and help us. And so they assumed that that was what they were to do. Now, what's the significance of that? That there he is at Troas, and he gets this vision, and this seems to be the leading of the Lord, and they concluded it is, and so they go.

They go to Samothrace and Neapolis and on to Philippi and all of that. And you say, well, all right, so the gospel went westward.

Yes, and ultimately to Europe and to the western world that were evangelized. So you might say, yeah, well, what difference does it all make? Well, just this simple fact.

Glasgow is west of Troas. Now, I know it's also northwest, but it is west of Troas. And there is a fact that the Holy Spirit gave two no's to Paul and then the direction to take the gospel into Europe.

And if you're a believer in Jesus tonight, it was basically because of that. It was the providence of God working in a mysterious way, closing doors, opening doors, and so on.

[ 5 : 52 ] But the gospel came into Europe. That was where it got its beachhead. It's pretty significant.

The strange providence of God in leading his servants. What's the import of that for us, other than what I just pointed out, which is a major one?

Well, don't we need to learn patience then about the hindrances and delays and the checks that God puts in our ways? Because you don't know what greater good he may have in view.

That he may be working in his perplexing way, putting roadblocks in your place at a certain time in order to bring about other things. Sometimes God's providence works in a very baffling way just in our own personal matters.

It was that way for Molly Pickard, I think was her name. It was 1944, this very time of year, and she was in London. And that was the time when Hitler's V-1 rockets were coming in.

[ 7 : 00 ] They would go over and then they would cut out and then they would come down. And they were falling on London and so on. And Molly Pickard was working one Saturday night.

She was a nurse. She got off work late on Sunday morning because of all the casualties that they had the night before. And she usually would go to the guards' chapel for church service and she was going to do that, but because she got off work late, she couldn't do that.

So she went to Westminster Chapel where Dr. Lloyd-Jones was pastor and she got there about 11.20, I think, while the service was in progress and Dr. Lloyd-Jones was praying and so on.

But then they heard the doodle bug. They recognized it and they knew there was all these V-1s coming and so on. And they felt the effects at Westminster Chapel, but it was the guards' chapel where they really got hit and 60 people died.

Now, I don't know what Molly Pickard thought of that, but in her case, she got off work late. Things weren't going according to schedule.

[ 8 : 12 ] And because of that, she decided to go to Westminster Chapel, which was closer, but in that case for her, it was a mysterious, life-saving delay.

Sometimes the Lord works this way in our own personal matters and we need to recognize it. It was that way also, sometimes in a way, he brings people to Christ, isn't it?

There was an old elderly minister, I think it was, that came up to Spurgeon on one occasion and he was trying to pull out a letter out of his pocket and his coat and he got it out and he wanted Spurgeon to read it because he said this was, he said, God Almighty bless you, to Spurgeon.

And the reason was that his son had run away from home and he was going to go to America and so on. Well, he did go to America. But after he got to America, he wrote his father and told him what had happened.

He said he didn't go, didn't sail on the day he thought he was going to sail. I don't know why it was delayed. But he said, he just decided while he was there in London that he would go down to the tabernacle and see what was going on there.

[ 9 : 22 ] Well, Spurgeon was preaching on apparently that Lord's Day or whatever service it was at the tabernacle. And as he was preaching, Spurgeon said, perhaps there's a runaway son here.

The Lord call him by his grace. Well, when that kid got to America and wrote his father, he said he did. He brought me to Christ. Who knows what that was?

Was that just a throwaway line in Spurgeon's sermon or what? But there was that son and that vast audience, perhaps there's a runaway son here. He's here, by the way, because his ship is late sailing.

But it was the means that the Lord used to draw him to Christ. We may not fathom all the Lord's checks and some of his periodic no's and some of his roadblocks and some of his altering our directions and all that sort of thing.

We may not be able to put that all together. But when everything's said and done, we have enough experience to know that jobs are lost. And yet souls are saved sometimes because jobs have been lost.

[10:35] We know enough that sometimes careers are ruined. And because careers are ruined, marriages are restored. God's providence is so baffling.

But it ought to be adored. And we ought to be thankful for it. Now secondly, you see in this narrative that the manner of God's work is so diverse.

Verses 11 to 18. The manner of God's work is so diverse. Now, you notice for one thing here, this little episode about Lydia, verses 11 to 15.

You can say here, God performs a quiet work. They apparently didn't have an actual bona fide synagogue in Philippi. Some may dispute that.

We don't need to go into that. But anyway, they thought there might be a place of prayer out by the river. And they found some women there. And here was this Lydia, who was a businesswoman, from Thyatira.

[11:42] And here she was, living in Philippi. She was, as the text says in verse 14, a worshiper of God. She was already, she was not a Jew, but she was attracted to Judaism.

She was a worshiper of God or a God-fearer of that sort. She wasn't a full-blown Jewish convert, perhaps, but she was on the front porch of the gospel, you might say.

She had instruction in the Old Testament scriptures. She was worshiping and praying, meeting for prayer with these women and these people. So, the Lord had already been working to that point.

But then, you have that beautiful little connection there in the last of verse 14, don't you, that Dr. Philip mentioned.

the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. You see, it's not just merely hearing the message, but you have to be enabled to embrace the message.

[12:50] It's like Jesus said in John 6, 44, that I'd be highlighting in your Bible if it's not. No one is able to come to me unless my father, unless the father draws him.

Well, the father drew her. And, interestingly enough, it was very quiet, apparently, when the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

But the Lord did it. You know, it's a quiet work. Now, on the other hand, you look at something like verse 18, verses 16 to 18, you see that God's work was a very dramatic work.

Lydia wasn't the only female loose in Philippi in these days. There was another. There was this girl who had spirit of divination and so on and would do fortune telling and she was sort of owned by some merchants and she brought in a good bit of gain for them.

and she followed Paul and Silas and the group and would say, you know, sort of their ad agency, I suppose, there in verse 17, these men are servants of the Most High God who proclaims you the way of salvation.

[14:10] Now, Paul was, ESV translates it, annoyed, verse 18, kind of worn out by this. Paul probably knew what would happen if he commanded the spirit to come out of her.

You know what happened in the wake of this in the narrative and he probably was aware that that might be the cost to pay. But, he nevertheless commanded that spirit of divination, that demonic spirit to come out of her and the medium.

Now, that's very dramatic, isn't it? It's interesting in verses 18 and 19, three times you have the use of the same verb to come out. You can't see it in your English version so well in verse 19, but he said, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her and it came out that very hour in verse 19 where owners saw that their hope of gain was come out.

Their hope of gain went out when that demon went out of, demonic spirit went out of that girl. Then there was trouble in River City as we say after that.

But very dramatic, wasn't it? It was public, it was authoritative, it was instantaneous, some would say it was sensational. What a dramatic work.

[ 15 : 27 ] Now, what's the import of this? I think it's important to compare the way God works and you see Exhibit A of that here.

You see God working quietly with Lydia, you see God working dramatically with this girl with the demonic spirit, you see later him working quite dramatically with the jailer in verses 25 and following.

and so on. So, a variety of the ways the manner of God's work is so diverse and I think we have to keep that in mind. One was gradual, Lydia's conversion.

One was abrupt, the girls. One was quiet, one was raucous. You just can't absolutize how God's going to bring somebody to himself.

don't voice the method he may have used in your case onto everyone else's situation and assume that if they're going to come to Christ, they're going to come because God will work in their life the very same way he did in yours.

[ 16 : 40 ] Well, we know better than that. We just kind of slot sometimes back into a way of thinking that tends to put God as if we could put him in a box and think he'll only work in this way if he's going to do this.

God is not that boring at all. You can imagine what the testimonies must have been like. Well, let's take the jailer for a dramatic kind of experience.

You know, the jailer, if he were giving his testimony, and I'm not always trying to advocate always giving sensational testimonies, but the jailer's was sensational and he might have said, you know, well, here I was, I saw that the prison was open.

I knew I had to do away with myself. I knew the prisoners had escaped. I took my short sword and in a split second I didn't know whether to plunge it into my incisor or take it across my jugular vein and then I heard this voice of Paul's.

And, you know, it's all pretty dramatic. And what about Lydia? You know, she gave her test. She said, I was just sitting there in my Bible study group and it all made sense.

[ 17 : 59 ] And there weren't any fireworks at all. Sometimes God worked that way too. You see the variety that you have here in the manner of God's working.

And we always have to take account of this. There was a time in the American Civil War. Well, the better term is War Between the States.

I won't go into why that's the case. During the War Between the States when the northern or federal armies were attacking the Confederates at Chattanooga, Tennessee.

They were going up Missionary Ridge and so on. And this group of federal Union soldiers were scaling the height at Missionary Ridge and the Confederates were so taken aback at their gall in making this attack that they fled.

And when one of the Union generals, Phil Sheridan, who was kind of, well, he had his own flair about him, when he got to the top to celebrate, he jumped on one of the Confederate cannon and rode it like a horse, pretending to ride it like a horse, and twirling his cap.

[ 19 : 14 ] Well, one of his brigadier generals, Charles Harker, thought, if the boss can do it, surely I can. And so he found another cannon and hopped on it. And apparently this cannon had seen a little more action and been fired a little bit oftener than General Sheridan's cannon.

And when Harker got on it, he burnt his backside so badly he couldn't sit on his horse for two weeks. In other words, don't think that you have to do the very same thing.

It can be perilous. And don't think that the living God is going to work in exactly the same way all the time. He doesn't have a cookie cutter.

The living God is original and he's not called the creator for nothing because he's very creative, isn't he? And he's not tied to one method or one way of working.

God is too interesting to be squeezed into our pre-selected molds. The manner of God's work is so diverse and he deserves your praise because of it.

[ 20 : 24 ] Now thirdly, the text teaches us that the pledge of God's power is so encouraging. Verses 19 to 26 and we'll look especially at verses 25 and 26.

The pledge of God's power is so encouraging and especially those famous as seen in 25 and 26 about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them and suddenly there was a great earthquake.

So the foundations of the prison were shaken and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened. Now I suppose that the magistrates after the complainers

raised a ruckus over Paul and Silas and what they had done and so on with casting out the demonic spirit from this slave girl.

I suppose people thought, the magistrates and so on thought, that a beating and a night in the slammer as it were and in the stocks would put the clamps on these fellows and they'd leave town peaceably with no difficulty.

And I suppose they had the idea, we have this under control. We've already beaten their backs to a nice pulp and they're in the jail and we've got this under control.

[ 21 : 53 ] This is not going to get out of hand. But notice what the text shows, especially in verses 25 and 26. God sets his witnesses free.

In other words, the powers of this age cannot control or stifle the witness of the gospel. It doesn't mean that gospel witnesses will not die and give their lives for the cause of Christ.

They will. But the powers of this age can never snuff out the witness of the gospel. And this text is meaning to say, don't you see, here's a little exhibit C that this is the case.

The text in Acts has already taught us this, hasn't it? You remember back in chapter 5 of Acts, and you don't need to turn there, but I just want you to know I'm not lying about this.

Now, Acts chapter 5 and verses 17 to 26, they put the apostles, the Jewish leadership put the apostles in confinement and so on.

[ 22 : 57 ] And they were going to bring them out the next day. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prisoners' doors and brought them out and said, go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.

And they did that. And the next day, you know, the priestly leadership and so on come and they say, well, let's bring them in. And they go there and the guards are there and the prisoner, the prison is securely locked, but the apostles aren't there.

Now, a little conundrum. What do we do with this? And then they hear a little gossip. Oh, they're over in the temple teaching the people. Now, you know, they didn't get the point, but you see there's something that the Lord was sort of hinting at there if they had had eyes to see it.

You can't stop the testimony to the gospel. If I want to continue it, I'll get my men out of prison right under your nose.

You know, you have the same thing then, not just in Acts 5, but in Acts 12, don't you? And verses 5 through 11, that's when Peter, you remember, was apprehended and was sleeping between two soldiers.

[ 24 : 18 ] He was bound with two chains and sentries were before the door guarding the prison. And the angel of the Lord stands next to him, struck Peter on the side, woke him, says, get up quickly.

The chains fell off his hands. He said, dress yourself, get your sandals on, put your cloak on and follow me. And Peter thought he was dreaming until he woke up, as it were.

He came to himself outside the enclosure and he was in the streets of Jerusalem, free as a bird. Now, God doesn't always do that, does he?

Because in that very chapter, in the first part of Acts 12, Herod executed James, the James of the James and John fishing company. He executed James.

James paid with his life, but Peter's released. But you see, it happens often enough, the Lord makes the testimony often enough that he's saying to him, when I want my witnesses free, I'll make them free.

[ 25 : 21 ] And there's nothing Herod Agrippa can do about it. And now here in chapter 16, verses 25 and 26, the same point.

It's a token of the unstoppable of a gospel. You can't stop that witness. God's power is so encouraging because it's a pledge that he will make sure that no matter what opposition comes against his testimony, that testimony will go on being given in spite of opposition.

It's just a token, isn't it? But it's as if he's saying to the rulers of this age, you are helpless, you know, to stop this. It's as if he is saying there's a incentive victory in the air if you believers can smell it.

Sometimes that's what the Lord does, isn't he? He gives us a token, just a sample, in order to let us know what it's going to be like. And here you see that the same Lord who opens hearts in verse 14 opens jails in verse 26.

There was a time during the Second World War, in fact, it was in April 1942 that U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt made an announcement over the radio that U.S. bombers under Lieutenant

Colonel James Doolittle had departed from Shangri-La and bombed Tokyo.

[ 26 : 56 ] You know, Shangri-La is a non-place, but it was actually from the U.S. aircraft carrier Hornet that somehow had sneaked within several hundred miles of Tokyo and into Japanese waters.

And these 16 B-25 bombers had taken off and they had done a bombing raid on Tokyo. As far as the damage they inflicted, it was rather negligible.

It was more of a nuisance raid and so on. But the people in Tokyo were near panic. Well, you might think so. If you were, if you're bombed, you might be.

But the thing that really, it frightened them, even though it did not do that much damage at all, they had been assured that no U.S. bomb would ever strike their home island.

They had been promised immunity. And this was just one instance that said, that's not necessarily so. And the rulers of this age tend to think, whether they be, wherever they may be, pick your tyrant of choice, wherever they may be, they think they can shut down that testimony and shut it out.

[ 28 : 14 ] This is just an instance. God just gives instances. And there are instances I could cite in recent 20th century missionary history and so on, where God gives tokens to His pressured servants that His testimony of His Son cannot be stopped.

You see what He's saying, there's no security for you from the Gospel and from its witness. And if you wonder why some of your relatives who don't know Christ get scared when you're around, this might be why.

They have the uneasy sense, you know, that they may not be able to escape the claims of Christ because if you submitted to them, well, that gets uncomfortably close.

So maybe that explains their hostility sometimes. But you have all the high priests and all the high priestesses of secularism who say we must not have this testimony in the public square.

We have all the evangelists of political correctness and neutrality that break out in hives whenever it seems that the Gospel cannot be contained.

[ 29 : 39 ] And yet that's the testimony here. I, please understand, I'm not a great advocate of necessarily of touting sports figures who happen to be Christians and so on.

It's not that I'm against them. I just, I'm just not on the bandwagon as it were, but I put that in as a little parenthesis. But what's hilarious to me sometimes is on, I don't watch your television because I'm not here, but occasionally in the fall we have American College football, the oblong ball, not the round one.

And they'll have some national game between a couple of big name colleges and so on. And at the end they'll interview maybe the key player and it may be the winning quarterback and so on.

And I've seen things like this. You know, they'll ask this winning quarterback, you had a brilliant day, about the game and give him the mic.

And he'll say, well, first of all, I just want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. You know, please understand, I don't, I'm not trying to say that the Lord has favorites in college football contests or something like that.

[ 31 : 06 ] Well, what's just amusing and hilarious is right out there on a public interview after football game when they expect him to talk about football, he begins by giving credit and praise to Jesus Christ and acknowledging him as his Lord and Savior.

Now you might say, well, that's really kind of crass. But just, no matter what the scenario is, you just can't shut that down.

And the announcer is embarrassed because he wants to get on to the football game. And this fellow started right off by acknowledging who his Lord and Savior was.

It's hilarious. The pledge of God's power is so encouraging. Now, fourthly, the evidence of God's grace is so clear.

Verses 27 to 34. The evidence of God's grace is so clear. Now, this jailer, he'd just been through a massive earthquake and a near suicide.

[ 32 : 10 ] And so whatever his question here in verse 30 means, sirs, what must I do to be saved? What did he mean by saved? What did he understand by saved?

Well, it at least means that he knew that he himself was in desperate need. And perhaps his word saved there reflects what that girl who had the demonic spirit was advertising about Paul and Silas in verse 17 when he said, these men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation.

Maybe that's where he kind of picked it up. But in any case, he was in desperate need. And the answer they gave, of course, in verse 31, was the basic demand.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. But don't neglect, verse 32, keep it in a bracket with 31. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

Why did they do that? Because it's not just shooting the Bible bullet at them in verse 31. You have to unpack that. You have to say, well, now to him, now let me explain who this Lord Jesus is.

[ 33 : 22 ] Let me explain what he's done. Let me tell you his story. Let me tell you why he came. Let me tell what it means to believe in him, etc. They had to unpack that gospel.

So they just didn't quote and say the words as if it was a magic mantra in verse 31. Then they explained it to him. They had a mini teaching session after that.

And notice that there's immediate evidence of his transformation. In verses 33 and 34, he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds.

And as I think Chrysostom or someone said, there was a double washing. He washed their wounds and he was washed from his sins. He was baptized and so on. So he washed their wounds, verse 33.

Verse 34, then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household. But the evidence of God's grace is so clear.

[ 34 : 20 ] It doesn't mean it's spectacular. It doesn't mean it's sensational evidence. It just means that there's clear evidence. He's changed. He washed their wounds and he gave them something to eat.

There was evidence of a change in this man. Washing wounds, providing a meal. Conversion, if it's genuine, always yields visible, tangible fruit.

It may not be great, but it will be, if it's not outstanding, it will be clear. Don McClure was a Presbyterian missionary for a number of years, say from the 1940s to, I don't know, 1930s, 40s to the 70s, something like that, in Sudan and Ethiopia.

And when he was at the Pakwo station, he told about some of the believers there, some of the people who had come to Christ. And he said there was one man there who, as they were receiving, apparently receiving members into the church, who had been a drunkard and a beggar.

He said he'd been thrown out of several villages because he wouldn't hoe enough grain to support himself, and the villagers refused to subsidize him and carry him along. He lost his wife because he couldn't complete the payment for the bride price.

[ 35 : 47 ] And when he came to the Pakwo mission station, he had tuberculosis, and he was a forlorn figure, and everybody around him was just glad to see him die.

But this man became a Christian, McClure said. He conquered his drinking problem, and he said he is now hoeing one of the largest fields in the community, and he's begun to take steps to get his wife and his small son back.

How do you know he was really converted? Because he's hoeing one of the largest fields in the community.

You know you're converted to Christ when you start hoeing your field, in his case. There was tangible evidence. There was once a young girl who came to Spurgeon and wanted to join the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

And so Spurgeon was interviewing her for membership, and he asked her about her faith, her knowledge of the Word of God, and her Christian experience, and so on. And then finally, after he'd gone through all of that, he says, well, all right, but what real evidence do you have that you've been converted?

[ 37 : 11 ] And the girl kind of blushed, and she said, well, I sweep under the mats now. Small thing, isn't it?

But it made a difference in the way she did her daily work. Why did she sweep under the mats? Because she'd come to Jesus Christ. And it was a tiny sign, but it was a real sign.

And that's the point. The evidence of God's grace is so clear. Have you not sensational evidence, but do you have some tiny, visible evidence that Christ has brought you to Himself?

So, look more closely at the text. Look at what God has done here. And what response will you have?

Well, if you see what God does in the text, you'll make the right response. And what is the right response? Worship. You bow down in worship, and you say, how wise is your strange providence. [ 38 : 26 ] You say, how refreshing are your diverse ways. You say, how heartening is your mighty power. And you say, how visible is your transforming grace.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, you are to be praised because you are great in Zion. And you are great in your world. We give you thanks, O Lord, for the evidence of your work. And we pray that you would cause us to look closely for it, both in the scriptures and in our own churches and our own lives, that we might not miss perhaps the small, but the grand things that your hands have done.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 39 : 44 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.