

“ABOUT DUNGEONS AND DEMONS.”

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Scripture Texts: Acts 16:16-24

Prayer: Holy Father, we come to you as finite flesh, weak and foolish, poor and needy. Make our worship a demonstration of your Spirit and power. Make my preaching a demonstration of your Spirit and power. Make our hearing and believing and obeying a demonstration of your Spirit and power so that our faith may rest on the power of God, for Jesus sake, Amen.

Introduction.

Some of you will remember me talking about a Scottish missionary in Albania by the name of David B. For years he ran an orphanage for Roma gypsy children who were outcasts in that culture. Phama and I made three trips to Albania in 2000, 2002 and 2005 and helped in the orphanage and got to know the kids and the staff.

In 2006 David was arrested on false charges of inappropriate behavior with children, the orphanage was closed down and the children scattered. He was sentenced to 20 years in an Albanian prison, which is nothing like the comparative luxury of an American prison.

Because of an early release program for good behavior David is scheduled to be released early next month after serving 15 years. During that time both his parents died in Scotland. His health has declined. But he has remained in reasonably good spirits and has been treated kindly by the prison guards because they know he was innocent.

His release is not guaranteed because the justice system in Albania is very unpredictable and corrupt. David has refused to give bribes to improve his chances. Pray he is released and pray for God's provision for all his needs as he reenters civilian life and tries to sort out the way ahead. His heart's desire is to return to Albania to minister there.

David's is only one of literally millions of stories since the time of Acts of Christians being persecuted, falsely accused, unjustly treated, beaten, imprisoned and killed.

For all of us these stories are far away, in distant countries, about people we don't know. But the stories are starting to come closer.

Contemporary suffering.

Christians in America today are increasingly being marginalized, disenfranchised, ostracized, mischaracterized, mocked, ridiculed. They are being spiritually distanced and socially distanced as they are pushed out of the public square and out of public dialogue.

Christians are being falsely accused of hate speech against gays, women, and blacks. Our religious views and perspective are labeled as offensive or as right wing extremist, or at least dumb, backwater, wrong side of history. We all belong on Duck Dynasty.

Christians and Christian views are being canceled from college campuses, from TV. Calvin University recently shut down a group of students challenging the LGBTQ views. Christian teachers and coaches are being stifled and silenced. In Canada Christian Churches are being closed, freedoms denied, and in one case in Edmonton a pastor was put in jail and the church fenced.

Acts is not ancient history, it is not something that would never happen here. It is not a matter of if for us but when. Our freedoms and rights are not guaranteed. Being wronged and experiencing injustice are very real possibilities, if not for us then for our children and grandchildren.

This week and next let's hear God's Word with ears open to being instructed by the Holy Spirit in how to be prepared. Forewarned is forearmed. We are told again and again in Scripture to expect it.

I Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

John 16:33 "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

John 16:1-2 "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."

Acts 16:16-18, the devil.

On a Sabbath on the way to that place of prayer outside of the town, Paul and the others with him were met by a slave girl with a spirit of divination by which she could tell the future. This is a girl under double bondage, bondage to her owners as a slave, and bondage to a demon who possessed her.

How is it that Satan who is known as the father of lies is telling the truth about Paul's message, especially when Paul's message was out to destroy Satan's kingdom?

Paul and Silas really are servants of the most high God and they really are proclaiming the way of salvation.

How can this truth be spoken by a lying tongue, a lying spirit? How can Satan be divided against himself?

Don't be deceived. Satan is far more subtle and crafty than any of us can imagine. If Satan is doing this, he is up to something far more devious and deceptive. What sounds like truth from his lips is a greater lie.

Satan doesn't always start with a lie, sometimes he starts with a truth or a partial truth, and then sets the hook for the lie. Satan is hiding himself behind a deceitful display of the truth, he is disguised. He is on the surface announcing the Gospel so that underneath he may do more harm.

I experienced this in a profound way many years ago while attending meetings in Salt Lake City and staying at the Marriot, owned by the Mormons. After being helped by an especially helpful hotel worker, I asked her why she was going out of her way to be so helpful to us. She answered, "Because we love Jesus." I was immediately taken aback by the lie and how deceptive and wicked it was. They don't love the true Jesus or profess faith in the same Jesus. This was the worst kind of lie, a subtle mix of truth and error. This is every cult.

I find it at the least ironic to see people wearing cross jewelry who are living lives completely contrary to the truth and power of the cross. Why do they wear the symbol of God's judgment on sin, and then go about sinning. Saying one thing, meaning another. Truth and lies.

Satan is here making an empty show of the truth. Satan has two methods for attacking the Gospel, either by open direct assault or by subtle subterfuge. Either by spreading false doctrine, or by pretending to be a friend of the Gospel while undermining its authority.

Remember the father of lies is also an angel of light. Be assured of this, the prince of darkness is trying to extinguish the flame of the Gospel.

Why didn't Paul accept the free advertising, even if it is from the competition? When your enemy is giving you free endorsement, beware.

Paul will not have the unclean spirits spoiling the purity of the Gospel. Anything the demons say will be to distort the message of Jesus.

Paul was just being like Jesus and not letting demons speak for him. Jesus rebuked the demons every time they spoke about Him. Jesus gave His power and authority over the demonic realm to His disciples.

Mark 3:14-15 Jesus appointed twelve ... to preach 15 and have authority to cast out demons.

"I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out immediately.

By these words Paul proves he is a servant of the most high God and he is proclaiming the true way of salvation. His words have power to break the power of Satan.

This is the triumph of the Gospel. God has all power over all that is evil, wicked and demonic in the world. We do not live in a dualistic universe where good and evil are equal and opposite forces. God is God over all the universe and creator of all that is in the universe. Satan is a creature, he is a fallen angel. He is under God's control and authority.

Two applications.

First, we live in a world that is hostile to the Gospel, sometimes directly, overtly, sometimes indirectly, subtly. Everything we believe is under attack in politics, business, advertising, internet, social media, TV, video games, entertainment choices, even fashions and clothing.

Why? We think the Gospel is great, it is the truth, everyone would benefit from it so why don't they believe it? One simple reason is because we rebel against authority. Our culture is in full blown rebellion against authority, whether it is the president or the police, the governor or the school board, teachers, husbands, parents, whoever it is that is telling us what to do.

Scripture is God's authority over us. The Gospel makes people mad, we by nature hate it, we don't want it to tell us what to do, we want to judge it, control it, bend it to our wills. Only when the Holy Spirit convicts us and changes our hearts will we love the Gospel and bend our wills to it.

True preaching of the Word is hated, no matter how perfectly it is preached, even by Jesus. The world only has two choices, either submit to Jesus or silence Him. If you love the Gospel and you live it and share it, you will be hated at some point by someone.

Take heart, the good news is the gates of hell cannot and will not prevail against the Church of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. We serve an unassailable, invincible, undefeatable, and ever-advancing Gospel and Kingdom of God. Be as fearless as Paul and have confidence in God.

Second, as Christians we are all in a position to help set people free from the power of Satan.

II Peter 1:3-4 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, ... having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Do you know someone in bondage to Satan's lies, to sinful desires, someone covered up in shame or guilt, someone deceived by some false doctrines?

We have God's power and truth in us to set others free through Spirit-lead preaching, teaching, counseling, godly advice, prayer, speaking the truth in love, confronting false ideas or ungodly life-style. Satan is not in control of this world and he never has the final say.

Speak the truth in the name of Jesus. Speak the words of Jesus. Pray with them to Jesus. Wash their souls in the water of the Word. Remind them of the power of God which is greater than the power of sin and Satan. Remind them there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Remind them of the grace of God which is sufficient because His power is greater than all our weaknesses. Speak the truth in love over and over again. Set people free with the Gospel.

Let us be wise and pray for and ask for the spirit of wisdom and discernment to be able to resist Satan that he will flee and set others free. This power is ours, it is in us, live in a manner that is a demonstration of the Spirit and power of God.

Acts 16:19-24, the dungeon.

Just as preaching the Gospel drives some people away, notice how *miracles* push people away from the Gospel as much as draw them to it. The same was true when Jesus did miracles. This great work of God was completely lost on them.

Follow the money. When you hit someone in their wallet, you will get a reaction. The reason they are mad is simple, greed. Their cash cow has dried up. Money as much as anything else keeps us from the Gospel, from loving it and living it. It disguises our need for the Gospel, for repentance and faith.

But of course they don't say money is the issue. They lie. The public order is being disturbed, laws are being violated, the peace is being disturbed. They are accused of sedition. They are accused of inciting the riot that the others are stirring up.

Attacks on Christians are often disguised, covered up with accusations of how the Christians are breaking laws, being a public nuisance, committing hate speech. Underneath is a guilty conscience reacting against godliness.

It is Satan's work to take what is good and godly and a benefit and blessing to the people and turn it upside down. It is Satan's work to take the Gospel and the church and pastors and Christians and make them seem dangerous or spreaders of destructive teaching.

Conclusion.

We will pause here and conclude for now, but next week will be amazing.

The powers of hell are lined up against the church, against pastors, against Christians, against Christian schools, against Christian ministries. Freedoms will be taken, restrictions will increase.

The Equality Act that is before the congress will mean anything but equality for those holding to a Christian worldview.

All hell will break loose. Prepare for it. Decide now how you will respond in the midst of opposition. My fear is we have become soft and accustom to our pleasures, our comforts. Our tendency is to be nice, to be silent, to lay low, to not attract any attention.

Perhaps God is using this pandemic to prepare us, to get us use to restrictions, to losing freedoms and rights. Will we do so joyfully when it is for Christ's sake?

Do you think Paul regretted what he did? Do you think he sat in his prison cell replaying the day and wishing he had just ignored the girl or left well enough alone? There is one way to avoid suffering, to compromise and seek the world's approval.

Have we ever done the right thing and then received a bad result and wished we had not done the right thing?

Paul knows he did the right thing, especially since it was accomplished by the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The bad result is in the hands of the God and His sovereign purposes.

Suffering is not always a sign of something bad, remember the suffering of Jesus. Remember the God of all power and grace who causes all things to work for good.

Do we fear acts of courage? Do we fear standing out? Do we fear being noticed for being out of step with the culture, with the tide in the affairs of men? Do we hear lies but keep silent?

Have we noticed ourselves compromising, giving in, holding our tongues, keeping our views and beliefs to ourselves? Hoping no one notices we are Christian? Do we hear ourselves making excuses, self-rationalizations? Are we becoming men without backbones?

When we desire pleasure over principle we are vulnerable to every manipulation, coercion, peer pressure.

Let us be honest men and women, and young people. Let us not go along to get along, let us not participate in lies, in falsehoods, in distortions of the truth, in the violence done to our consciences, or more importantly to our Lord and His Gospel.

Let us not live by lies, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What did Simon of Cyrene say on Good Friday evening?

We don't always choose the moment of our cross bearing. We don't always choose the moment or means of our suffering. They come upon us in unexpected ways, frightening ways, painful ways, seemingly random ways. Yet is it really random? Is anything really random? God planned that moment of cross bearing for him. And He plans that moment for each of us when He calls us to serve and follow Jesus, sometimes in painful ways.

Acts 14:22 ... through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Matthew 16:24-26 Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Pray: Holy Father, may our lives in this dark world be a reflection of Jesus and a demonstration of your Spirit and power. Deliver us from evil, and use us to deliver others from evil and the evil one. Come, Holy Spirit, fall afresh on us for the glory of Jesus and His Gospel. Amen.