

May 24, 2009
“Upsetting Christians”
Acts 16:16-34 (NLT)

Last week I spoke to you about being the church. The church is not something we attend; the church is not something we go to; the church is us, the people. The church is not the building, the church are the people gathered in this building. Remember the whole, “Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the door and see all the people”? Well, we call the building with the steeple a church, but all along it was the people in side that is the church. And the people are meant to go and continue the mission of God.

Mission always assumes that someone or a number of people are sent. You have to be sent to accomplish a mission. God the Father sent Jesus, God the Father, and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, and God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sends the church.

The church congregates on occasions, for example on Sunday for worship, or for a time of prayer, or for Bible Study, instruction, and training. But, then we leave here to go into the world with the mission of God. You are always the church, not just when we are gathered in this building. We must stop thinking of church as something we go to once or twice a week. It is easier to be the church here once or twice a week. But we are to be the church all the time, and wherever we are. We need to come together, for worship, prayer, inspiration, encouragement, and training, but then we must go out there and use what we’ve learned, and be who we are. We are the church, followers of Christ, sent out to accomplish God’s mission. What is God’s mission, and therefore our mission? To go into this broken, sin – filled world and bring redemption.

If we are going to accomplish our mission we must always be acting like the church, not just when we are in this building, but all the time. Most think that being a Christian means attending a church and being good in church. Then leave the church and live anyway we want just like the rest of the world. We are to be in the world but not of it. In other words we need to go into the world, but not to act like the world, rather we are to act like people sent by God on a mission. We are to be like Christ...which is what Christian means. The church are all the redeemed in Christ, continuing the mission of Christ in the world.

What if for one day you would live your life with Jesus’ heart? Let me say that a different way, what if for one day Jesus lived your life with His heart? You still would have the same job, or attend the same school; still live in the same neighborhood; still have the same schedule, and hobbies; still live under the same circumstances; all your problems *are not* solved; the only thing that has changed is that your life is led by the heart of Christ. His priorities determine what you do; His passion governs your decisions; His love motivates your behavior. What would change? What would you be like? Would people see a change? If Jesus took over your heart what would change?

Because this is exactly what the Bible says in Philippians 2:5 (NCV), “In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus.” You see, we are to have the Heart of Christ, and His heart is pure, peaceful, and purposeful.

And here is the thing, if you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, and asked Him to take over as Lord of your life, you *have* the Heart, mind, Spirit of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16 AMP

we have the mind of Christ (the Messiah) *and* do hold the thoughts (feelings and purposes) of His heart.

Yes, we are still growing into the likeness of Christ, but we have a new heart. So what if for one day Jesus lived your life with His heart? That’s what we are called to do. That is the mission, bring Jesus into your world and to those you have contact with every day.

Now let’s look at our scripture reading for today:

Acts 16:16-34 (NLT)

One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a demon-possessed slave girl. She was a fortune-teller who earned a lot of money for her masters. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."

¹⁸ This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And instantly it left her.

¹⁹ Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. ²⁰ "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. ²¹ "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice."

²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to

make sure they didn't escape. ²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! ²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

You know sometimes Christians can be upsetting. They can be upsetting in a bad way or in a good way. Sometimes *I* get really upset with Christians. I mean those who can be an embarrassment to our movement. Of course the media loves to pick the stories that will embarrass us, and rarely tell the stories of the much good Christians are doing around the world (e.g. pastors in Africa claiming children are witches and asking a family's 6 months wages to cure the child).

I have to say that most times when I hear someone begin to speak of their faith on national television I cringe. I've heard some great ones where I've said, "Praise God for that powerful witness." And then I've heard others where I said, "Oh, I wish they'd have kept their mouth shut (kind of like Paul and the girl in our scripture).

God never called us to be obnoxious but He did call us to confront a sinful world. There's a big difference. I see that difference in this text as we read about Paul and Silas going through the city of Philippi. Their ministry, their message, their very presence was powerfully confrontive, but they were not obnoxious. They did not cause people to be turned off to the Gospel, rather people wanted to hear what they had to say.

Sometimes I see Christians who become, like I read someone call them, "kamikaze evangelists." They're going to witness for Jesus; they don't much care if anybody comes out alive. That's not the attitude that Paul and Silas have here, but they certainly did shake things up in this Roman city. There were people in this city who were in bondage to sin and to Satan. All that Paul and Silas began to do was to announce that in Jesus freedom had come.

They set the slave girl free from her bondage. This poor girl who had been taken captive by an evil spirit was set free in the name of Jesus. We see that as good news, but those who thought they owned this girl weren't very excited. They were about to lose revenue. She was a cash business and now it was gone. The world doesn't like it when you start setting free what it thinks it owns. The words spoken about Paul and Silas by these merchants, as they are trying to get them in trouble, are so powerful and instructive: "The whole city is in an uproar because of these (men) Jews!"

They weren't being obnoxious about it. They were just announcing that in Jesus forgiveness and freedom and real life had come. But to a world bent on its own destruction, that can be upsetting news--it means things are about to change. And it didn't end there. They did get thrown into jail but even then they are not defeated. They begin to sing and to praise God. As they do an amazing thing happens: the place literally blows apart with the Spirit's power.

The jailer, knowing what happens to jailers who lose their prisoners, is about to do himself in. You see once again, Paul and Silas are upsetting things. Instead death, the jailer finds freedom and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Paul and Silas were upsetting Christians. It's all through the book of Acts. But they were upsetting Christians in the very best way. "These men are throwing our city into an uproar"

Could that ever be said of us? I'm not so sure it could be, at least not in the best ways. As I look at the Church in America, anyway, I certainly don't see us throwing much of anything into an uproar except ourselves. We argue and fight over how things should be done inside the Church and meanwhile the world yawns and writes us off as totally irrelevant. The only Christians who seem to be upsetting anything are the obnoxious ones.

I'm not sure we are upsetting and confront the world with the message of truth. They either just tolerate us or ignore us or write us off. In some cases, we've become so much like the world that there is hardly any distinction. We've either become so much like the world there is no distinction, or we've become so isolated from the world that our witness has no effect.

Did you hear about what happened in Chicago? A 15-year-old boy shot by gang members while playing basketball, lay bleeding to death in an alley just steps away from a hospital emergency room. The emergency room personnel refused to treat him, saying it was against policy to go outside, they would have to call 911 instead. After waiting about 20 minutes, a frustrated police officer finally commandeered a wheelchair and brought the boy in himself, but it was too late and he died. Now I don't understand about the hospital policy and all the circumstances of this case, but when I heard that story I thought, "That's a picture of the Church." Here we are all safe and sound in our sterile environment. We've got the personnel and skill, the resources, the medicine. We say to the world, "Come and get well. We have the answers, if you'll just get yourself in here we'll give them to you." A few happen to trickle in and we make charts and graphs to show how effective we are.

But just outside people lie dying because we won't go out to where they are and help them in.

Jesus prayed for us: "Father, I do not pray that you take them out of the world but that you protect them as they work in the world." We need to go and upset things and cause uproar; not in a bad way, not in an obnoxious way, not in an immoral way, not by being an embarrassment, but by speaking and living the truth that is effecting the life of others who are being set free.

That's what Paul and Silas were doing. They were powerfully engaging their world. They were upsetting things not because they were pushing a personal agenda of confrontation. They were upsetting things because they were announcing the truth and people were being set free! Sometimes it got them in trouble! They got thrown into jail for it. When the culture began to make things tough for them, their response was not to retreat or to become bitter about the society. Their response was to praise God, realizing that God can even work with a jail sentence.

What do we do when our culture begins to make things tough for us? I'll tell you what we do. We complain, we demand our rights, we get mad at politicians, and we either retreat or get obnoxious. This just isolates us further from the very people we are trying to reach. Don't be surprised when our society makes it tough on Christians. What do you expect? The world has gotten so far away for God and His principles for living, that just our life confronts the fallenness of this world. Of course they're not going to jump up and down with excitement when we do that.

Our mission is to do what Paul and Silas were doing. Proclaim to people in bondage that they can be free in the name of Jesus Christ. Our lives should be so powerful and so disconcerting to a lost world that people are regularly asking us the jailer's question: "What must I do to be saved?" Then we announce the gospel: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

You see, a little religion kept in its place is okay. When you start “disturbing the city” you’re out of bounds. You’re becoming an upsetting Christian. If you live authentically, you will be upsetting to the world.

My question for us this morning is: are you upsetting anything? And again not by being bizarre and obnoxious, but by living a pure life and speaking up for what is right. Does anybody in the world notice that you are a Christian? Is anyone ever brought under conviction about their sin because of your pure life? Is anyone ever confronted about their selfishness because you proclaim the gospel of self-sacrifice? Is the world upset at all because you are a Christian? If not, we really need to ask ourselves why.

Have we become so much like the world that the threat has been taken away; there really is no difference? Or have we become so isolated from the world that even if we were to experience a revival of the spirit’s power, our connections are all gone and the world wouldn’t notice?

Are you an upsetting Christian? Are we an upsetting church? I want to be. I want us to be. But we must be fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus so that it will be evident to the world that the power is from God and not from us.