

Value All
Acts 16.16-19; Ps. 139.13-16
January 21

Acts 16 describes the advance of the gospel into Europe. In Europe, Paul preached a gospel message that made in-roads to three levels of society. The three individuals mentioned in Philippi represent three levels of society. Lydia, the wealthy businesswoman, belonged to the upper class. The slave girl belonged to the lowest level of society. Since retired army veterans often served as jailers, the jailer represented the middle class.

Our lesson focuses on Paul's encounter with an unnamed slave girl. In the culture of her day, the slave girl was a person objectified and used by others for economic gain. What lessons does this episode in Paul's ministry teach us?

First, Jesus possesses the authority to liberate young women bound in slavery (Acts 16.16-18). Paul and the missionary team encountered a demon-possessed girl on the way to a place of prayer. The Jewish population of Philippi was not large enough to have a synagogue. In such cases, Jews gathered beside a river for a place to pray (Act 16.13). As the mission team returned to the place of prayer by the river, they encountered the young slave girl. As I make application of this lesson on the sanctity of human life, I wonder how many times I have failed to observe people bound in horrific conditions as I drove to church.

Acts characterizes the girl in terms of her possession and message. First, the young girl experienced a double possession. First, her owners possessed her. "Lord of her" is a literal translation for "owners." Second, a spirit possessed the girl. The Greek New Testament states the girl had a spirit of a "python." "Python" was a serpent that guarded the entrance to the famed oracle of Apollo at Delphi. The spirit assisted the girl with fortune-telling, a practice universally condemned in Scripture. Second, her message hindered the communication of the gospel. Fortune-tellers, ancient and modern, are infamous for ambiguous messages. Her message contains a double ambiguity - "these men proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the servants of the Most High God" (Acts 16.17 CSB). On the one hand, while "Most High God" is a biblical title for God in the OT (Ps. 78.35), the Greeks used the phrase as a description of Zeus.

On the one hand, there is no definite article in the Greek NT before "way of salvation." Thus, she spoke of an ambiguous "a way of salvation" rather than "the" way of salvation.

Luke described the motivation of Paul's command, "In the name of Jesus Christ come out of her." Regarding the motivation for Paul's command, the CSB notes that Paul was "annoyed." Here, I think the KJV is a better translation of the Greek. "Paul, being grieved, said to the spirit." Do we grieve when people treat people as objects for monetary gain? Furthermore, Luke highlighted the consequences of Paul's command. First, the spirit immediately came out of her. Second, using the same verb translated "came out," Luke states the owners hope of profits "came out." Thus, the profits exited when the spirit exited.

Rather than treating the young girl as an object as the spirit and owners did, Paul treated her as a person.

Second, the Bible affirms that human life is sacred (Ps. 139.13-16). Psalm 139 declares that human life from conception to death is sacred to God. The Psalmist highlighted God's active involvement in human conception through the use of intricate embroidery. Notice critical truths from the passage. First, God sees and knows people in the womb (v. 16a) even from the earliest embryonic stage (formless- v. 16). Second, God knows life in the womb as a person not a mere mass of tissue. Third, Psalm 139 attributes human life to God's active involvement, not mere natural processes. Each person is special to God; therefore, Christians should value all people.