

As we continue our series on the beginning of the church, we find Paul and Silas participating in the spiritual work of true believers in Philippi. On the Sabbath we find them heading outside the city to find the place of prayer along the riverbank. So, my first question is why outside the city and not in the city synagogue? Philippi is a Roman city with very few Jews living there. It takes a quorum of 10 Jewish men to have the synagogue meeting so Paul searches for the place of prayer where he can share the good news of Jesus Christ not to the Jews but to the Gentiles. It is on the riverbank where the women have gathered for prayer that Paul is able to share that good news of Jesus.

The first step in the spiritual work of true believers is to find a place of prayer.

It can be anyplace, but as you consistently meet God in your place of prayer you will find that God's Holy Spirit will be made known to you. A few years ago, Pam and I took a road trip to the Red River Meeting house in Kentucky, where in June of 1800 a great spiritual awakening began. The moment I got out of the car I was engulfed by the overwhelming peace and holiness of the atmosphere. It is what some call a thin place where heaven reaches down and touches the earth. It is indeed a place of prayer, and this is the kind of atmosphere that is available to each of us if we take our spiritual work seriously.

The story of Lydia gives us more clues about our spiritual work. She is a God-fearing Gentile who is described as a worshiper of God, which creates the atmosphere for God to open her heart to experiencing the spiritual reality here on earth. This holds true for us today. In our prayer time we not only are asking God to intervene in the situations we pray about, but we need to truly worship God, tell him who he is, use scripture to remind him of his covenant relationship with you as a true believer in Jesus Christ. Tell him how much you love him, sing praises to him. Worship and adore him as if you are in the very throne room of God. As you yield yourself to God's Holy presence you will be in that thin place where heaven reaches down and touches earth.

Lydia, the seller of purple cloth, would have been selling to those who were rich and powerful, as the purple cloth was expensive and often used by royalty. Think of the many opportunities she would have had to share the gospel message that she had heard from Paul. She also offered Paul and Silas wonderful hospitality, by giving them a place to stay.

So now the next steps in the spiritual work of true believers is in our place of prayer as we worship God in Spirit and in Truth which allows God to open our heart to experience the spiritual reality.

But then we also see the physical result of the spiritual work in sharing the gospel with others and offering hospitality to those in need.

Our scripture goes on with the story of Paul and Silas encountering the slave girl who keeps taunting them with a spirit of divination as they are on their way to the place of prayer. She would yell “These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved.” She was stating the truth but as with any demonic activity she went too far and Paul got so exasperated that he took his spiritual authority and ordered the demon to come out in the name of Jesus Christ and it came out. Paul demonstrated God’s power and the believer’s authority to triumph over evil and save even the lost who have been used by the evil one.

One of the most important aspects of the spiritual work of true believers is being able to triumph over evil by successfully using God’s power and their spiritual authority in the name of Jesus Christ.

This slave girl’s public fortune telling had been a wonderful money maker for her owners and now she couldn’t make any money because the demonic spirit of divination was gone out of her. This made her owners angry and of course they blamed Paul and Silas, dragging them to the authorities where they were stripped of their clothing and beaten with rods. After this public humiliation they were thrown into the innermost cell of the prison and put in stocks so there was no way to escape. Here is another battle between good and evil.

Paul and Silas have got to be in pain from all the abuse they endured. But instead of wallowing in their pain and the circumstance they find themselves in they begin to pray and sing hymns to God. What a great way to witness to their faith in Jesus Christ and share their faith with the other prisoners who are listening to them.

God’s answer to their prayers and worship comes at the midnight hour with the earthquake that shook the foundation of the prison, opening all the doors and breaking open the chains that had bound them. God had liberated them. But they did not leave their cell.

The jailer woke up and saw the doors open, he was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had all escaped, but Paul shouts “Stop! Don’t kill yourself! We are all here!”

The jailer’s reaction was to ask, “what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.”<sup>32</sup> And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. They were also all baptized

And now we see there was much bigger plan evolving than just granting freedom to Paul and Silas. God’s plan was to save the jailer and his family.

True believers don’t run in freedom but stay for the opportunity to save others.

Let's once more go over the various aspects of the spiritual work of true believers that we found our scripture this morning.

Find a place of prayer.

Pray and worship God in Spirit and in Truth which allows God to open our heart to experience the spiritual reality.

See the physical result in sharing the gospel with others and offering hospitality to those in need.

Triumph over evil by successfully using God's power and the believer's spiritual authority in the name of Jesus Christ.

True believers don't run from others when experiencing freedom but they stay in the presence of sinners for the opportunity to save others.

Our thought for today says:

"Wherever the Spirit moves, the work of worship and witness by faithful people brings freedom to all who believe."

Richard M. Landers