**The Power of the Gospel of Grace**

(Acts 16:33-40)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

Two dimwitted men chartered a small plane to fly them to a remote area to do some moose hunting. When the plane returned to pick them up a week later, they had bagged six *big* moose. The pilot said, “My plane doesn’t have enough power to carry that much weight.” They replied, “Nonsense! We shot 6 moose *last* year and the pilot had the same kind of plane you have. So the pilot reluctantly agreed to fly them—but he was right. His plane *didn’t* have enough power, and it crashed shortly after takeoff. When the dimwitted men climbed out of the wreckage, one asked the other, “Any idea where we are?” The other answered, “I think we’re pretty close to where we crashed last year.”

Then there’s the man who told his friend: “I saw Elvis the other day at Home Depot in the power tool section. His friend said, “Really? What was he doing in the power tool section.” The man replied, “He *returned a sander.”*

Speaking of power tools, and planes with not *enough* power, here in Acts 16 the Apostle Paul and his coworker Silas have just been beaten and thrown in jail. But God sent an earthquake to *spring* them from jail, and they led the jailer to the Lord. And now we’re going to see the power of the gospel of grace begin to work in the life of the jailer. The story begins in verse 33, where we read of the tender loving care that the jailer gave Paul and Silas:

**“And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:33).**

In case you’ve forgotten *which* hour of the night this happened, a glance back at verse 25 of Acts 16 will remind you that it was the *midnight* hour. You know. The hour you’d *usually* find the jailer *sleeping in his bed,* and *not* washing the backs of his prisoners. But he was so thankful that Paul and Silas had told him how to be saved from his sins that he just couldn’t *wait* to show his gratitude.

And he showed it by washing the *gaping* wounds that the beating they’d received earlier that evening had left on their backs. Now *that’s* a powerful effect! And we’ll see more of the power of grace in a minute.

But first, when verse 33 says that the jailer was baptize, “he and all his,” that’s a reference to his family. That means when the earthquake roused him from his sleep, his family ran to the prison with him to investigate the noise.

And that raises the question of how Paul could have baptized them *at a Roman prison.* I mean, do you really think a Roman prison just happened to have a *huge* but of water standing by, filled with a sufficient amount of water to *immerse* people? Sure, Philippi had a *river* nearby, but you have to *leave the city* to get to it, as we saw back in Acts 16:13, where Luke wrote:

**“...we went *out of the city* by a river side...”**

Even pictures of what we think was the prison that held the apostles don’t show a river anywhere nearby. So how did Paul and Silas immerse the jailer and his family?

The answer is, *they didn’t.* Water baptism in the Bible wasn’t by immersion, it was by *sprinkling.*

Now maybe you’re thinking, “How do you know that?” Well, we know that the *purpose* of water baptism was to *cleanse* men from their sins, because in Acts 22:16 we read,

**“...be baptized, *and wash away thy sins”***

When water baptism was part of God’s program, it was *for salvation.* It *cleansed* men of their sins. And in the Bible, spiritual cleansing was *always* by *sprinkling,* as it says when God told Moses to

**“Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, *and cleanse them.* And thus shalt thou *do* unto them, to cleanse them: *Sprinkle water of purifying upon them...”* (Numbers 8:6,7).**

If you were unclean in the Bible, the only way to get clean was to be sprinkled with water, as it says *again* in Numbers 19:18,20:

**“...a clean person shall take...*water,* and *sprinkle* it upon...him that touched...one dead, or a grave...the man that shall be unclean, and shall *not* purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because...the water of separation hath not been *sprinkled* upon him; *he is unclean”***

Did you know that someday *God Himself* will sprinkle all the believers in Israel, right before they enter the kingdom of heaven on earth, as He promised in Ezekiel 36:24,25:

**“...I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I *sprinkle* clean water upon you, *and ye shall be clean:* from all your filthiness…will I *cleanse* you”**

Now with all those verses about *sprinkling,* you have to wonder how the tradition of *immersion* ever got started. And it might be because the Greek word *baptismos* is related to the word *bapto,* which means *to dip.* And my dictionary says that the word “dip” means *to immerse.* But here’s the thing: when it comes to water baptism, it wasn’t *the people* who got dipped. Numbers 19:18,19 says,

**“...a clean person shall take *hyssop*, and dip *it* in the water, *and sprinkle it upon…the... unclean.”***

It was *the hyssop* that got dipped in water, and then the water was *sprinkled* on the people. I’m told that hyssop was some sort of flowery bush of the mint family, so getting sprinkled with it made you smell good to God! And probably to others as well.

And we know that those Old Testament *cleansings* were actually *baptisms,* because Hebrews 9:10 calls them,

**“...divers *washings...*imposed on them...”**

That word *washings* there is the Greek word *baptismos.* So water baptism was actually an *Old Testament* rite, not a *New Testament* rite, as is usually taught. That explains why the Jews asked John the Baptist what they asked him in John 1:25:

**“*Why baptizest thou then,* if thou be not that Christ...?”**

Did you notice they didn’t ask him *what* he was doing, as they would have done if he was doing something *new?* They knew *what* he was doing from all those divers Old Testament washings. They just didn’t know why he was doing what Ezekiel said *God* would do if he wasn’t their Christ. If he wasn’t *God in the flesh,* they wanted to know why he was sprinkling people as Ezekiel said *God* would do. They expected *God* to sprinkle them *right after God gathered them to enter the kingdom,* and here’s this guy John sprinkling them, and saying,

**“Repent ye: *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 3:2).**

It was time for the kingdom, so it was time for the Jews to get sprinkled with clean water. John wasn’t standing in the Jordan River so he could *immerse* people. He was standing in the river so he could easily dip his hyssop in the running water of the river (cf.Lev.14:5,6,50-52; 15:13; Numbers 19:17) and then sprinkle it on the people. That explains why Mark 7:4 talks about

**“...the *washing*...of *tables”***

The word “washing” there is *baptismos,* and few if any of the homes in Israel had tubs of water large enough to immerse a *table.* But they all had *pots* big enough to immerse some *hyssop* to use to sprinkle their tables in one of their many ceremonial washings. And that’s how Paul and Silas baptized the jailer and all of his during the transition period of the Book of Acts here.

But after the jailer washed their stripes, and they washed away his sins, it says in verse 34 of our text:

**“And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:34).**

Now here we see *more* of the power of grace working in the jailer’s life. I mean, the chances he ever brought any *other* prisoners into his home, where they’d be a danger to his family, were slim to none, and Slim just left the building, as we used to say. Can’t you just hear it: “Honey, guess who’s coming to dinner—*one of the prisoners!”* He’d have had to watch out for flying frying pans. Of course, in this case, the jailer’s wife believed too, so all the cookware remained in the kitchen.

Now you’ll notice that verse 34 says that *“he* set meat before them.” I’m guessing that this was something his wife usually did for guests. But the power of God’s grace was so strong that this man who earlier had clapped their feet in stocks is now insisting on serving them supper. The hardened heart of that Roman guard had been *melted* by the power of God’s grace.

But now, according to *religion,* this is not what was supposed to be happening if you went around telling people what Paul and Silas told this jailer back in verse 31:

**“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...”**

Paul told the man that he could be saved by believing*,* and *not* by *behaving.* Religion says, “You can’t tell a man he can be saved without behaving, because if you do, *he won’t behave,* he’ll live in sin instead, and do whatever he feels like doing.” But the power of God’s grace *changes* what we feel like doing! Look what the Lord said to a guy in Mark 10:52,

**“Jesus said unto him, *Go thy way;* thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he...*followed Jesus in the way.”***

The Lord told him to go his way, and instead *he went the Lord’s way.* The man who was *God in the flesh* told him he could go his way, and do whatever he wanted to do, but now all he wanted to do was follow the man who had made him whole.

So it’s true that when you’re saved by believing and not behaving that you can do whatever you “want to,” but when you get saved, God changes your “want to.” As Paul puts it in Romans 7, we’re not always able to *do* what we want to do, but the “want to” is there!

Now if Paul *had* told the jailer he had to behave to be saved, he wouldn’t have been able to do what it says at the end of verse 34 there and “rejoiced”—he would have *feared* instead You see, if your salvation depends on your *behavior,* you can never be *sure* you’re saved, because you can never be sure you behaved *well enough,* or *long enough.* That’s a prescription for living in fear if ever I heard one.

But the jailer understood that his salvation *didn’t* depend on what he did, it depended on *what Christ did for him* on the cross of Calvary! And if *you’re* saved by believing, and you’re *not* rejoicing, that means you don’t have the sense God gave a jailer. Actually, it means you just need to grow in your *understanding* of your salvation, for the joy of salvation doesn’t come automatically.

But do you know who *wasn’t* rejoicing over all of this? The rulers who had the apostles beaten and imprisoned in the first place. They had felt the earthquake, and had heard how it opened the prison doors and dropped the chains of the prisoners, and it didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that this meant the God of their newest prisoners had shook *the planet* to free them because they hadn’t done anything wrong. So it says in verse 35,

**“And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go” (Acts 16:35).**

After Philippi’s rulers heard that Paul’s God had sent an earthquake that freed the prisoners without killing anyone, they figured they’d better let the apostles go before their God decided to do something a little less surgical and kill *them.* So they sent the sergeants to tell the jailer to release them, and in the next verse of our text the jailer gives Paul the good news:

**“And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace” (Acts 16:36).**

Now you’d think that after hearing that, Paul would look at Silas and say, “Let’s blow this pop stand,” as they used to say in those tough guy movies. Or, “let’s make like a tree and leave,” as we used to say when we were kids. But Paul’s plans didn’t include leaving!

**“But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out” (Acts 16:37).**

Paul told the jailer, “I got no time for sergeants, and whatever unofficial freedom they’re offering. I demand an *official* release from the very rulers who wrongfully imprisoned us!”

Here we learn that Paul and Silas were *both* Roman citizens, and it was evidently against the law to beat and imprison citizens unless they were tried, convicted and condemned by a Roman trial. And now that those bozo rulers had publicly jailed Paul, he demanded that their *release* be *just as public.*

In so doing, he wasn’t trying to protect *his* reputation. He was trying to protect the reputation *of the gospel of grace.* He knew that eventually *the whole world* would hear about his incarceration, and he wanted the world to know that the apostle of grace had done nothing wrong.

What Paul was *also* doing was *putting the fear of Rome* in those rulers—and it worked!

**“And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.**

**“And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city” (Acts 16:38,39).**

So Paul got the public release he was looking for. He had them falling all over themselves trying to keep from getting in trouble with Rome. Can’t you just picture the walk of shame they had to endure, as they walked to the prison with their tails tucked between their proverbial legs, their heads hanging down as they were forced to publicly acknowledge that they were *wrong* to imprison God’s ambassadors?

The public humiliation that Paul gave those rulers is actually a picture of the public humiliation the Lord gave the rulers we read about in Ephesians 6:12, where he spoke of

**“...principalities...powers...*the rulers of the dark-ness of this world...*spiritual wickedness in high places.”**

As you may know, heaven has rulers, just as earth has rulers. And most of heaven’s rulers *fell* when Lucifer fell. And when Lucifer got *Adam* to fall into sin, the devil took humanity *captive,* and he’s been holding men captive ever since. But God did something about it when He had His son die for us on the cross. Colossians 2:14 says that on the cross, the Lord was

**“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, *nailing it to His cross;* And having *spoiled* principalities and powers, *He made a shew of them openly,* triumphing over them in it.”**

Now that *spoiling* there is not the kind that parents give their kids on Christmas. It’s the kind you hear about when men talk about “the spoils of war,” and when they say “to the victor go the spoils.” When a nation conquered another nation in those days, they spoiled them *of their possessions.*

And when the Lord won the victory over Satan and his host at the cross, he spoiled them *of their captives in the human race.* And when He did, He made a show of them openly, just as Paul did to those *earthly* rulers in Philippi. Paul *shamed* those rulers for what they did to him, and the Lord shamed those *heavenly* rulers for what *they* did to *us.* He shamed them in front of the millions of His *unfallen* angels in His heavenly host, and made a show of them openly.

Of course, that’s notwhat *human beings* saw that day on Calvary’s hill. What *they* saw was the very *opposite.* They saw what Mark describes in Mark 15:16-20:

**“...the soldiers...clothed Him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about His head, And began to salute Him, *Hail, King of the Jews!* And they smote Him on the head with a reed, *and did spit upon Him,* and bowing their knees worshipped Him. And...*mocked* Him...and led Him out to crucify Him”**

People saw the soldiers shaming *the Lord.* And you can bet your bottom dollar that those unseen principalities and rulers were shaming and mocking Him as well. It wasn’t until God revealed the mystery to Paul that we learn that the Lord was shaming *them* behind the scenes, and *spoiling* them of their captives.

And that spoiling wasn’t the *only* public humiliation the Lord gave Satan’s rulers. Look what *also* happened behind the scenes. Paul revealed in Ephesians 4:8 that

**“When He ascended up on high, *He led captivity captive,* and gave gifts unto men”**

After the Lord rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven forty days later. And when He did, He led captivity captive. So what’s that mean?

Well, the only other time that phrase is used in the Bible, it helps us understand it. Back when the Canaanites took *the Jews* captive, Deborah and Barak rescued them, and the Bible calls *that* taking captivity captive. Afterwards, we read:

**“Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, *and lead thy captivity captive...”* (Judges 5:12).**

So to lead captivity captive means to make captives of the men who held *your people* captive. That’s what Deborah and Barak did to the Canaanites, and that’s what *the Lord* did to Satan’s host when He ascended into heaven. At the *cross* He spoiled them of their captives, but at His *ascension* He took *them* captive, and “gave gifts unto men” (Eph.4:8).

What kind of gifts? The gifts of *their thrones,* and their positions of authority in heaven. Someday God is going to *replace* those wicked rulers *with members of the Body of Christ.* And if you don’t think that *humiliated* Satan and his host, I’d encourage you to read the legend of Robin Hood, and imagine how wicked Prince John felt when King Richard returned and stripped him and his gang of thugs of their positions and gave them to Robin and his merry men. Because that’s how humiliated Satan was at the Lord’s ascension, when the Lord took the devil’s thrones and gave them to us.

Well, after Paul set things straight in Philippi, he left to preach elsewhere—but not before doing one more thing that we read about in the last verse of our text:

**“And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed” (Acts 16:40).**

Before Paul left, he stopped to comfort the new church family that had sprung up in Philippi.

But before we talk about that, did you notice that first it says Paul and Silas “went out of the prison.” You know what that means, don’t you? It means that after the jailer took them into his home and fed them that sumptuous meal, Paul announced: “Okay, time to go back to prison!” And I can almost hear the jailer objecting, “I’m not putting you back in my prison!”

It was then that Paul had to explain to him that while the government had been wrong to jail him, God’s people respect the authority of the government *even when they’re wrong.* That’s why he flat out *refused* to leave the prison until those *rulers* decided to *officially* release him. So after supper, they had the jailer walk them back to the prison and lock them up for the night.

Now if you want to talk about the power of God’s grace—*that’s it!* Most believers *rebel* when the government is wrong, but *grace* believers shouldn’t. And the power we show when we submit to rulers even when they are wrong is power like nobody’s ever seen.

And all of that is a picture of how the Lord freed *us* at the cross, but how He refuses to take us to heaven at the rapture until Satan’s host is forced to acknowledge that *they* were wrong to imprison us.

When’s that going to happen? Well, in Ephesians 2:2, the apostle Paul calls Satan

**“...the prince of the power *of the air...”***

And we’re going to have to go *through* the air to get to heaven at the rapture. And *that’s* when Satan’s host will be forced to officially release us from our prison here on earth, just as we see pictured in our text here in Acts 16.

But now, who are all these “brethren” at Lydia’s house that we read about in verse 40? Before Paul got tossed in prison, the only brethren meeting at Lydia’s house were the members of her family who believed the gospel with her. But it sure sounds like there’s more brethren meeting in the home of Philippi’s first convert now. So where did all those other believers come from?

Well, I think there were two things that suddenly caused the Philippian church to flourish. First, when people saw God miraculously shake the planet to free Paul and Silas, then a lot of people believed on their God. The ladies of Lydia’s riverside prayer group had been mulling over what Paul had preached, as well as those who heard him preach during the “many days” that the demon-possessed damsel followed Paul around. All it took was a miracle to push them over the edge.

But second, when those same people heard that the apostles hadn’t fled when God freed them, they knew their God must be the *true* God, for only the one and only true God could make His followers act in such a way that was so contrary to human nature.

Both of those things were *powerful* testimonies to the fact that their God was God, but only *one* of those two kinds of testimony are available to God’s people today. God’s not working miracles and giving signs and wonders to verify our words today in the dispensation of grace. But you can still give a powerful Pauline testimony to the world by respecting the authority of the government like Paul did.

And when verse 40 says that *the apostles* comforted *the brethren—*wouldn’t you think it would be the other way around? Wouldn’t you think that *the brethren* would be comforting *the apostles?* I mean, they were the ones who’d just been savagely beaten and sent up to the big house. But evidently, while Paul and Silas were *singing* in prison, the brethren were *worrying* about them *outside* of prison. So those men of God had to comfort *them* instead of the other way around.

And that’s our final example of the power of God’s grace. It can turn you from being someone who *needs* comfort when you’re afflicted to someone who can *give* comfort when you’re afflicted. And *that* is a testimony that literally *screams* that you have something that unsaved men don’t. You’ve actually got something that even most *saved* men don’t. You’ve got the unfathomable power of God’s grace.