

Marketplace Missionaries 2 - Acts 16:16-40 When people dislike your values - Freedom

We're following the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey...

... in this series called Marketplace Missionaries

- Every one of us is a missionary
 - So as we look at how Paul went about Mission, we can think about our own 9-5, and how we do mission

Last week we looked at how to find God's guidance in your 9-5

... noting that the Holy Spirit changed the game plan on Paul

... stopping him from going north or south

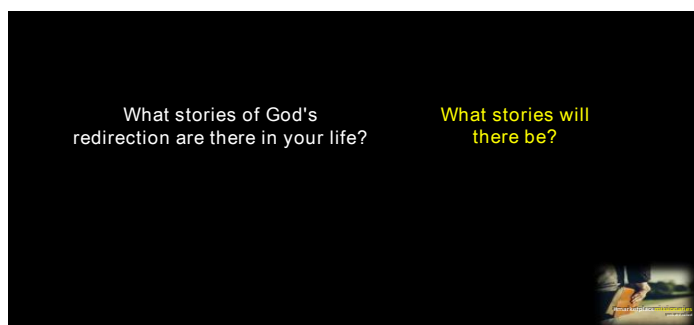
... and instead leading him into Europe by way of a dream

We talked about positive and negative guidance

How it's equally important to know what God doesn't want you to do

- And that even dreams can mean of God guidance
- In fact, God uses dreams constantly in the Bible

And we left it with these questions:



And so we continue with the next part of the second missionary journey today

The surprising thing about being a hospital porter...

... as I was for almost 2 years

... is that all of us Porters - or Orderlies as they are called in NZ - were young guys around the age of 20

- And basically, us 20 year olds ruled the hospital

... because we realised that if we didn't do our job moving people and things to where they had to be

... the whole hospital would come to a grinding halt

It could be full on at times...

... but other days you'd sit around for ages just waiting for your bleeper to go off

So on Mondays we'd sit in our porters' room

... and the guys would talk up their exploits from the weekend

- Who drunk the most?
 - Who got who in to bed?
 - ◆ They'd frequently talk about women's body parts, sexual prowess
 - ... all of that

And they would mercilessly tease the youngest Porter

- Come on Saj, what kind of a man are you?
 - Drink more, party more, bed some girls
 - ◆ Saj was 17

Having me in the room really ruined their game plan

- I didn't help them tease Saj
- And in the weekend, while they were wasting their money, ruining their bodies with alcohol and causing emotional pain to women
 - ... I'd go to movies with friends or shows in the West End
 - ... and the best part of my weekend was going to church

I was so excited about God

- ... and it gave me a confidence in who I was
- I had no desire to be like the other Porters
 - And I knew I had to show Saj there's a better way to be

While I did my best to maintain reasonable relationships...

- ... with the other Porters
 - ... they really didn't like my values
- It ruined their game plan with Saj
 - It made their boasting seem not quite so impressive

What clash of values have you experienced in your 9-5?

- Has following Christ made you different to those you work with?
- And if so what were the effects of that?
 - Did you feel isolated? Shut out?
 - ◆ Or did those values give you freedom and confidence?

There's an amazing sequence of events...

- ... in our Acts passage today
 - ... and they all spring from a clash of values right at the start
 - One set of values leads to freedom and hope
 - The other, to slavery
 - See if you can spot those as we read through

Acts 16:16-40 Blue/Red - p921; Brown - p665

16 One day as we were going down to the place of prayer **[where they met Lydia in last week's passage]**, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. 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.

35 The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!" 36 So the jailer told Paul, "The city officials have said you and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace."

37 But Paul replied, "They have publicly beaten us without a trial and put us in prison—and we are Roman citizens. So now they want us to leave secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves to release us!"

38 When the police reported this, the city officials were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. 39 So they came to the jail and apologized to them. Then they brought them out and begged them to leave the city. 40 When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

What an incredible story!

- In one reading it's hard to compute everything that happens

Slave girl with evil spirit | spirit cast out by Paul | slave girl's owners take revenge

Paul & Silas beaten, imprisoned | earthquakes opens prison | prison guard attempts suicide

Paul saves him | prison guard & family become Christian | Paul & Silas officially released

They demand their rights as Roman citizens | They're asked to leave town

How do you grab the message of this and apply it to our 9-5?

- It seems such a fantastical story from an era so completely removed in every way from us
 - Or maybe not?
- It's all set off by a clash of values - we have those today
 - And the organising theme of this story seemed to be - freedom

- Who doesn't want to experience freedom in their 9-5?

So for example, in your 9-5

... what are some of the **Daily Annoyances** you face?

- We could have a sharing time about that
 - Maybe we shouldn't!

Maybe it's a person in your business who constantly picks away at you

... or a kid in your class who is hard to put up with

- Or a job you do because no one else wants to do it
- What is that daily annoyance you face?
 - If you don't have one, my goodness you're lucky!

For Paul and Silas...

... it was this slave girl that followed them around calling out to the crowds of people they were trying to work with

- Verse 18 says this went on day after day
 - And that Paul and Silas found it exasperating
- It would be so much easier to do our job without this flipping annoying girl tailing us and calling out stuff
 - I'm guessing she made Paul & Silas look like nutters
 - Even though what she was saying wasn't actually wrong

And then you've probably also had...

... **opposition from those who dislike your values**

- Paul and Silas accidentally destroyed someone's business
 - This slave girl was a fortune teller, making money for her masters
 - When Paul cast the evil spirit out of her, her masters were not happy at losing their income

So these business owners...

... took Paul and Silas to the marketplace

... where nobody actually knows Paul and Silas

... but before you know it they've convinced a mob of people,

... and the city officials, to beat them up

No one says: Hold on - why are we beating these guys up again?

- Apparently it's because Paul & Silas were causing an uproar and teaching unlawful customs
- The real reason, has nothing to do with that at all
 - It's because they were bad for the slave owners' business
 - But it's not hard to incite a crowd to pick on outsiders, or people who are different

I trust your 9-5 isn't quite as barbaric as that...

... but if you experience **physical pain** in your 9-5, then Paul & Silas would certainly understand

- It says they were 'severely beaten' here
 - Lacerated backs and aching limbs
- Paul was beaten up so many times that he would've lived with ongoing pain issues
 - In his later life he says: 'My life is being poured out like a drink offering'

Just as Paul didn't deserve to have to live with that pain...

... many today live with chronic pain or chronic fatigue

... debilitating migraines, carpal tunnel syndrome

... all kinds of conditions that unfairly affect how you feel and function in your 9-5

I know some in this church, who in their 9-5's...

... are victims of **unjust authority**

- Just like Paul & Silas were 'publically beaten and imprisoned without a trial'

And some who've faced 'slurs on your reputation'

- I love how the authorities say to Paul & Silas: 'OK you guys can leave now'
- It's like saying: 'We'll just pretend this never happened - ok?'
 - 'Those scars on your back, that will stay for life'
 - Those aching joints
 - If you guys can just see fit to limp on out of here, we can call it quits at that, right?'

When Paul & Silas won't accept that...

... they finally resort to manipulation

- 'We've done everything you want - now we're begging you to go'
 - But why should they have to go?
 - They're Roman citizens
 - ◆ *The only plausible reason is because the slave owners don't like them much*

Finding Freedom In Your 9-5

- **Daily annoyances (v16-18)**
 - the slave girl
- **Opposition from those who dislike your values (v19-21)**
 - their hopes of wealth were now shattered'
- **Physical pain (v22)**
 - 'stripped and beaten with wooden rods'
- **Unjust authority (v22-24, 37)**
 - they have publically beaten and imprisoned us without a trial'
- **Slurs on your reputation (v37)**
 - 'how they want us to leave secretly?'
- **Manipulation (v39b)**
 - 'begged them to leave the city'



That seems a pretty comprehensive and relatable list...

... of things I'm sure we'd all love to be free from in our 9-5's

- And they all come from this one story in Acts
- **Which one of those 6 things is the biggest issue for you in your 9-5?**
 - And how do you deal with it?
 - ◆ What if you could be free from it?

DISCUSSION?

I don't know how to make someone free immediately from all that
... but three things are so obviously helpful in this passage that they virtually say themselves

1. It's not un-Christian to speak up for yourself

There's an annoying stereotype...

... that Christians have to be nice people who don't rock the boat

- But Jesus yelled at Pharisees and threw over tables, so it's all nonsense

I love how in the story...

- Paul and Silas don't just endlessly put up with the daily annoyance of the slave girl
... they cast a demon out of her!

And I love where Paul and Silas get told: 'You can go now'

- 'You can leave prison'
- And Paul says, 'Actually ... I don't think we will be leaving.
 - Your people have beaten us and put us in jail illegally
... because guess what ... we're Roman citizens!
 - ◆ So **you're** now going to go and get the people who did that to us
... and they're going to apologise us and personally release us'
- 'You're what? But you seem like Jews! How were we to know?'
 - **'Well you could've asked!'**

And I love even more, how at the end...

... they beg Paul and Silas to leave town

- And you might expect them to hightail it while their luck is still running
- But no.
 - 'We don't really feel to leave just now. We're going to visit our friend Lydia, and the church we planted here.
 - ◆ And then ... in our own good time, when we're good and ready thanks
... perhaps we'll move on.'

Far too often when Christians have told me about struggles in their workplace...

... I've found they **haven't** spoken up for themselves

- *'I wouldn't want to rock the boat'*

- *'My bosses wouldn't listen'*
- *'It won't change'*

And all the while the person doesn't realise ...

... they have power to bring change

- It didn't look like Paul had any power here either - he was a prisoner for goodness sake!
 - Yet somehow it's Paul calling all the shots in the last half of the story
 - He makes every use of the power he **does** have
- Shouldn't we all be prepared to suffer, like Jesus suffered?
 - Yes - but not needlessly, when people haven't followed their own laws

Many of us are conflict avoiders

- It's simpler to keep your head down and put up with things
 - ***But that won't make you free***

Often in a marriage...

... one person will avoid conflict at any cost, to keep the peace

- It's just feels easier that way
- ◆ ***But that approach won't make you free***

There is a difference between arguing - with your spouse ...

... or your boss or your school teacher

- and speaking up for yourself

- It's a crucial life skill
 - Paul had mastered it
 - We need to also

2. Sing when you're losing

How many of you...

... when you're beaten to within an inch of your life

... burst into song?

- Paul and Silas did
- You'd expect it to be groans that came from their mouths, not songs!

Their feet were clamped into stocks

- Bars on the windows and doors
- Untreated wounds on their backs and faces
 - And pain throughout their bodies
 - And yet in that subhuman state they are singing their hearts out to God
- Is this one of the best worship moments in the Bible?

- Do you wish you were there to join in and sing with them?

Or maybe not, because we're funny about that aren't we?

- I mean we wouldn't just burst into song in a public place like that would we?
 - Someone might hear
 - ◆ And then what might they think of us?

Can you imagine Silas saying to Paul:

... I'm not sure about this singing out loud business

- It's embarrassing; the guard might hear
 - ◆ The other prisoners might hear
 - And what would they think of us then?

I mentioned U2's frontman Bono last week

- I remember him also saying:
 - *'In Ireland if you want to sing, you just sing. So someone will stand up in a pub and just start singing, and others will join in. No one worries.'*
 - But kiwis are so much more circumspect and coy than that
 - We wouldn't dare just burst out singing, anywhere, for fear that someone might think we're loopy
- And it just so makes me want to go and live in Ireland
 - But even if I did go to Ireland and burst into song purely because I wanted to
 - ... I'm sure my kids would still say: 'Dad stop it - you're an embarrassment'!

But you know I get sick of the rules in our country

- Rules like, 'Don't speak about faith in public - it makes people uncomfortable'
 - 'Don't speak about the thing that excites you and matters more to you than anything else in the world.'

Those years back as a porter in that London hospital

... I'd do the late shift which involved a security round and collecting all the hospital rubbish bags

- Some nights I'd sing worship songs the whole way round - out loud
 - ◆ I had no desire to tone it down whatsoever
 - ◆ I was happy for people to hear

But what's so good in this story...

... is that their singing of hymns is pretty much the **turning point**

- Everything had gone wrong up till then
 - And they decided that even in their miserable state, with nothing working out
 - Where God's hand is not seen
 - They chose to give glory to God
 - To refocus on Him

... and from that point, everything changes

Can you do that?

- I know that for a lot of us when we're down
 - ... we think: 'I just can't go to church and celebrate with all those happy people'
- Maybe so
 - Yet Paul and Silas could sing while they were losing
 - And God seems to have met them in that, and turns their fortunes dramatically around

Maybe there's a discipline here

- Enter into the spirit of praise - even when you don't want to - and see if God meets you there

[Hard for me. I get depressed. Your prison / heart song?]

3. It's not about you; it's you and God together

In your 9-5, the things that matter the most...

... the things that will endure

... are the things you and God do together

And it's all the way through this passage

- Paul commands the evil spirit to leave the girl
 - But it's God who makes it leave

They sing hymns in their chains in a supreme act of faith

- But it's God who sends the earthquake

It's God who changes the heart of the jailer

- Yet he only lived to accept Christ because Paul stopped him committing suicide

In your 9-5...

... maybe you're a supremely gifted business person

... maybe you're the best teacher in the school

... maybe you're the lawyer that takes the toughest cases

... maybe you're the most attentive and diligent Mum in the whole of West Auckland

But it's not about you!

- So much will fade from memory
- But the things you did with God in your 9-5
 - ... those are things that matter most
- It's where the Kingdom is built
 - It's where people were put ahead of projects
 - It's where needs were noticed

- It's where we prayed Your will be done as it is in heaven, and He met us in that

If you want to live with freedom in your 9-5

... in a world where a clash of values can force your hand

- If you're tired of the little and big things that tie you up at work

... take hold of these principles from the story of Paul and Silas:

- **It's not un-Christian to speak up for yourself**
- **Sing when you're losing**
- **It's not about you; it's you and God together**

PRAYER - include prayer for Health Sector people

People you have called to care when others hurt

- Just as Paul and Silas appreciated the care of the Philippian jailer as he washed their wounds
- The challenges they face:
 - Working with difficult colleagues
 - The frustration of not being allowed to share the gospel overtly
 - Dealing with the stress of working with very ill and dying people.
 - Of trying not to take that stress home at the end of a day

All of us:

- Not 'rock the boat' people: To know and become good at speaking up for ourselves (as opposed to arguing)
- The discipline of praising you when we're losing (so much harder than when things are going well)
- To look to the things that matter most in our 9-5 - the things in which we can partner with you

Invite Prayer Ministry Team

Question: **What's your prison song?**

- That reminds you of all that God has done for you, at the times when you need it most?

SONG: **And Can It Be**