

Sunday, May 9, 2021

A Convicting Spirit

(Reimagining Church Series; Message 27)

(Where Do We Go From Here?)

Acts 16:16-40

Review (Slide): We're continuing our series on Reimagining Church...

August - focused on prayer and waiting...

September - focused on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit...

October - focused on the early church's Rule of Life: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer

November - focused on the Church's mission

January - focusing on Spirit-empowered leadership

February and April - focusing on the marks of a believer: a personal relationship with Jesus, being in community, a wall-break and bridge builder, a balcony person, and a pray-er...

May - Where do we go from here...

Scripture:

¹⁶Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

²²The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the

jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³²Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

³⁵When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

³⁷But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

³⁸The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Message:

Murphy has a set of **"laws"** that experientially resonate (common sense):

1. If anything can go wrong, it will.
2. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is as easy as it looks.
3. Nothing is ever completed in the allotted time.

4. If several things can go wrong, the one causing the most damage will be the one that actually happens.
5. If there are four things that can go wrong and you find a way to address each one, a fifth possibility will develop.
6. It is impossible to make anything foolproof because fools are actually ingenious.
7. Anything that begins well, ends badly; anything that begins badly, ends worse.

We have made these “laws” because experientially they often resonate! The reality is that the wind always seems to be in our face...i.e., there is always **resistance** to **progress**, always trouble along the path, always friction moving ahead, always problems and challenges to be faced.

Maybe that’s why the Celtic benediction is “*May the wind always be at your back.*” Having the wind at your back is obviously a great blessing if you’re boarding a ship on a missionary journey like Paul and Silas have done in this passage from **Acts 16**. But the “wind” they really need - and we need, and the Church needs - is the breath of the Holy Spirit. (*Wind and Spirit* are the same word in the Greek).

THE SPIRIT

While Paul, Peter, and the disciples get the headlines in this book of Acts; the **Holy Spirit is - without a doubt - the main character.**

Allow me to make two basic assertions about the Holy Spirit. First, while the Holy Spirit guides individual believers, he came primarily to build **Christ’s** Church and expand the Father’s Kingdom. (That is, the Holy Spirit is not our personal genie).

Second, in our individual lives, the Spirit’s primary focus is on **forming us** into the image of Jesus rather than on just getting us to do the right things and give us what we want. We all know people who do the “right things” for the wrong reasons. But if Christ rules our heart, good things will consistently emanate through our life.

Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit comes, “*he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment*” (**John 16:8**).

“*...in regard to sin because people do not believe in me*” (**16:9**); i.e., getting people to follow Jesus is the mission of Christ’s Church.

“*...in regard to righteousness because I am going to the Father*” (**16:10**); i.e., Jesus is leaving this earth, so the Spirit will be taking up Christ’s work of convincing people to follow Jesus.

“...about judgment because the prince of this world stands condemned” (16:11); the opposition is still running around the world spreading sin and evil.

The Spirit is either convicting us or we’re resisting (i.e., interfering with) him. In non-believers, it’s very easy (they consistently resist); in “believers” it’s not quite as simple.

Few would **acknowledge** they’re (intentionally) resisting the work of the Spirit. Few plan to embezzle from church, advocate heresy, or set fire to the building. But we may be gossiping about a fellow church member, ignoring the call to corporate prayer, complaining about a leadership decision, causing tension and disunity, or refusing to share our testimony.

Truth is - even among those who call themselves Christ-followers, the Spirit is at work convicting some while others seem to be resisting his work; and in those who resist him, their heart slowly grows harder and colder.

It is one thing to acknowledge the Holy Spirit has a ministry of **convicting** people; it is quite another thing to open ourselves up to **be** personally **convicted**. Yet, being convicted through the work of the Spirit is the foundational and fundamental step toward forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation and Life; it is a wonderful thing. Every time someone becomes aware of their need to be forgiven, falls before God and receives his mercy, it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

We’ve seen the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul, and now the jailer and his family. The Spirit convicts us through love and grace; the Spirit always leads us to be loving and gracious. But following the Spirit is seldom **easy**; the **opposition** is often intense.

The convicting work of the Holy Spirit has to start in us...beginning with sorrow.

In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul says there are two kinds of sorrow (guilt) - **godly** sorrow (that leads to life) and **worldly** sorrow (that leads to death):
“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

Let’s go back to **Acts 2**.

--Godly sorrow leads to **action**; worldly sorrow **paralyzes** people - *“When they heard this they were cut to the heart...’Brothers, what should we do?” (Acts 2:37)*

--Godly sorrow leads one **closer** to God; worldly sorrow brings **shame** and separation - *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.” (Acts 2:38).*

--Godly sorrow connects one to **community**; worldly sorrow builds **walls**, pushes people away and promotes isolation - *“So those who welcomed the message were baptized and that day about three thousand persons were added” (Acts 2:41).*

--Godly sorrow brings restoration and **joy**; worldly sorrow simply brings more **guilt** - *“they ate with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people” (Acts 2:46-47).*

So this morning let's pause and follow the Psalmist's invitation - *“Search me, O God and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and led me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).*

Charles Steinmetz was a genius with General Electric in the early 1900's. Following his retirement, a machine broke down and no current engineer could figure it out. They called in Steinmetz. He spent a few minutes walking around the machine, took a piece of chalk from his pocket, made a cross on one piece of the machine, and left. The engineers disassembled that part and it turned out to be the source of the breakdown. A few days later they received Steinmetz's bill: \$10,000 (a huge sum in those days). Unhappy with it, they returned it to him requesting an itemized bill. It came back itemized: Making one cross mark: \$1. Knowing where to put it: \$9,999.

Anyone can make “X's”; only the Holy Spirit knows exactly where to put them. Are you willing to allow the Spirit to come into your life and make some “X's?” If the Holy Spirit were walking around you, where might he put an “X”?

How do we **submit** to the convicting work and ministry of the Holy Spirit?

--Ask God to make you **sensitive** to the Spirit's leading - God's kingdom cannot come; his will cannot be done...unless we are willing to listen for His voice and follow His leading.

--Engage the **Word of God** (Gospel). Are you in the text daily? God speaks most clearly through the Scripture!

--**Listen** for the words of God when people speak. Here in **Acts 16**, the jailer listens to Paul, embraces his word, and the jailer and his family come to faith. In **Acts 24**, Felix listens to Paul, ignores his word, and sends Paul away.

--Set aside time to **examine** your heart and life (**1 Cor. 11:28**). We all have work to do. Use the chalk. Make an “X” where you need to be spiritually transformed and get to work fixing it...

(Now to) THE STORY

Philippi is a Roman colony - often known as "little Rome" (2PICs). The citizens of Philippi were Roman citizens; wore Roman dress, spoke Latin and Greek, worshipped Roman gods, and kept the Roman customs.

In **Acts 16:12**, Paul and Silas arrive in Philippi and "*went outside the city gate to the River, where we expected to find a place of prayer...*" **(PIC)**

Jewish law required a city to have ten adult Jewish males to maintain a synagogue; when Paul arrived in Philippi, they didn't have one (or he would have gone there). If there was no synagogue in the city, Jewish communities were to meet by the river (most cities were built by water) to pray...so Paul and Silas went to the river to find the Jewish community and they shared the Gospel with the Jewish women who came there.

There was a female slave possessed by an evil spirit making her unscrupulous owners very wealthy by being able to tell people's fortunes. She started following Paul shouting, "*These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you how to be saved.*" **(16:17)**. She keeps shouting until Paul "*gets annoyed*" (i.e., deeply troubled; had enough) and sets the girl free from the demon in the name of Jesus. And now...her owners are deeply annoyed; their easy money machine is gone.

What this girl was saying was absolutely true, so why did Paul intervene?

Answer: Because the Gospel **does not (cannot) tolerate** the testimony of anyone who is governed by evil; who is not convicted by the Holy Spirit; i.e., who is **resisting** the Spirit.

Anyone dealing in occult, astrology, or evil is motivated by self-interest; including those who call themselves Christians but are resistant to the Spirit's leading (i.e., they are not fully devoted). This girl's testimony may sound like solid truth on the surface, but the reality is, it won't be very long before it will be mixed with a little error, a little untruth, a little lie and passed along as all Truth. (Most lies are mostly truth with a tinge of untruth.)

Paul and Silas are almost immediately hauled into the marketplace (public forum) to face the magistrates. There were confronted with two charges:

First Charge: They are **Jews**. You know how the Jews are. They think they're better than we are; they call us Gentiles; they don't want like to associate with us; they always seem to cause trouble.

Second Charge: They recommend customs unlawful for Romans. They are politically **incorrect**; they put God before country; they don't fall in line; they don't follow the majority; they live by a different moral standard. (Ever been

accused of being a Christian? You know how Christians are - they are homophobic, judgmental, hypocritical, bigoted, antiquated, manipulative...)

They are “*ordered stripped and beaten with rods. After they were severely flogged, they were thrown into prison...*” (16:22-23). Murphy’s law would say: *No good deed goes **unpunished***. Paul and Silas (and the others: Timothy, Luke etc.) are placed in shackles in the inner cells “*and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.*” (2PICs).

Paul and company are convicted by the Spirit; they respond with prayer and singing. They’re singing because the enemy had blinked, the Gospel had penetrated; the Truth was out. They know that because there was opposition. The truth always strikes a nerve.

I’d be singing, “*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying...*”, they’re singing, “*Build Your Kingdom Here,*” “*Oceans,*” and “*Praise God from whom all blessings flow.*”

Their conviction by the Spirit had brought them so much restoration and joy even in the midst of very difficult circumstances, they can sing about their great God.

(I love Luke’s note: 16:25 - “*The other prisoners were **listening** to them*”). Murphy’s laws might say, “*Even when you think you’re alone, the world is **watching**.*” The world is always watching Christians, always judging us, always calling us out. The early disciples **exemplified** Christ-like behavior – as all Christ-followers should.

Then there is a massive earthquake - a not uncommon phenomenon in that area. This one undermined the prison; walls must have collapsed; prisoners could walk out - prisoners the jailer had recently beaten and mistreated were now unshackled and free.

The jailer panics: he figures he’s a dead man - either at the hand of the prisoners or the hand of the authorities - and is about to fall on his sword when Paul shouts, “*Don’t do it! We’re all here!*”

To make a long story short, the jailer and his family are convicted by the Spirit. The jailer asks, “*Sirs, what must I do to be **saved**?*” (16:30). The believers - severely beaten - respond with grace: “*Believe in the Lord **Jesus** and you shall be saved!*” (16:31).

Saul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy had all marked the “X” in their life and “fixed it” through faith in Jesus. They now have a story to tell. The Greek here carries a deep sense of urgency; do it without delay! The jailer falls trembling before Paul and Silas. The chalk is out. The mark is made. He and his family are baptized. The impact is immediate: The jailer washes their wounds, invites

them to dinner. The jailer has been transformed. Christ's Church is being built.

As our **witnessing** goes, as we are being Christ-like, as we live out of his love and grace, so goes the **Church** - from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the Gentiles, to Asia Minor and now the first European convert.

THE STATUTES

Let me leave you with a few more common sense "rules:"

First, for every spiritual breakthrough there will be corresponding resistance. The arrest, beating, imprisonment - God said it would be part of Paul's ministry from the beginning: "*I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.*" (Acts 9:16).

As Roman citizens, Paul/Silas were protected by Valerian and Porcian laws; so why didn't Paul say, "*Civis Romanus Sum*" ("I'm a Roman Citizen") and avoid the beating? (I think I would have!).

Answer: For the **sake of mission**. It would have spared them the beating but entangled them in a protracted trial with an uncertain outcome and detoured them from the mission. It was all about the mission! It is all about the Gospel!

In fact, "*Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*" (2 Timothy 3:12). When we focus on the **mission**, there will be **opposition**; it shouldn't take us by surprise. Are we willing, like Paul, to take a beating for Jesus? Today few people are even willing to be inconvenienced for Jesus - let alone suffer for him.

Second, moving from singular to plural is essential to being church. Some suggest vocabulary isn't important; it is actually essential and revealing...

There is a dramatic change that occurs in Acts 16:10 - Luke has been narrating this history in the **third** person: "*They went..., they had..., they passed...*" (cf. 16:7). In 16:10 it becomes "**we**" (some say this is where Luke joined the group).

That may or may not be true - but this is where Luke becomes part of the **fellowship**, where he embraces the **mission**. In 16:16, it is also "we" - so not only are the joys ours but also the sufferings.

When you talk about this Church is it "they" or "we"? When you pray is it "My" our "Our?" Have you placed the "X" in your life so you understand it is all and always about Jesus! Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where what is best for the community is more important than your personal wants, needs, and desires? Have you embraced His mission? Is it more important than yours? Are you *seeking to glorify God by: worshipping Him*

whole heartedly; witnessing His love to all people; (and) working to bring His Kingdom to every area of life?

Are you a bystander or an **eyewitness**; are you simply observing or **belonging**? Are you a spectator or a player? Is being a follower of Jesus an association you keep or has it become your **identity**? Are we a wall builder or a bridge builder?

Third, even if the odds don't appear in our favor, Jesus is still our Savior. Do you want to be like **Jesus**? Yes, we say. Really? Jesus was challenged, ridiculed, betrayed, tried, beaten, and crucified. When we are ridiculed, abused, betrayed - when the wind is in our face - we have the opportunity to be more like Jesus. It all begins with our willingness to **listen** to the Spirit and the courage to make an "**X**" in our life.

If we stick with Jesus - in spite of earthly odds - we'll be fine. If we persevere in this life or are called home - Jesus is still our Savior.

Finally, and if there is only one "rule" (one truth) you can remember, this is the one: "Jesus is Lord!"

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