



## Paul vs. the Pimps – Touchpoint for May 28, 2025

### Acts 16:16-34 (NRSVUE) Paul and Silas in Prison

TOUCH POINT

<sup>16</sup> One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a female slave who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup> She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

<sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. <sup>20</sup> When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city <sup>21</sup> and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to adopt or observe.” <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup> Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” <sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” <sup>31</sup> They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” <sup>32</sup> They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. <sup>34</sup> He brought them up into the house and set food before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.”

**Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

*“...an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken...”*

A short glossary for this Touchpoint

**Fundamentalism** – “a strict, literal adherence to sacred texts and core beliefs, often rejecting modern interpretations and cultural influences”

**Prostitution** – “a person (such as a writer or painter) who deliberately debases their talents (as for money)”

It's hard to understand why this woman was shouting relentlessly about Paul. If she was heckling, it was positive heckling, which I think is an oxymoron.

Maybe she was blinking twice and asking for help. Because under the full definition of prostitution she was being forced to debase her spiritual gift. This would make her a biblical prostitute and her owners, pimps. The implication of this unpleasant examination is important for how we operate today.

In sports, children/athletes are being prostituted every day when institutions and leaders fail to create a safe environment for their students' personal development. It is accepted in our culture for a coach to make promises to a kid and then violate those promises by leaving. In the press conference we'll hear, "I made a decision that was good for my family." Then a child-athlete is turned over to a new owner. Coaches have owners as well.

There are fine human beings who dedicate themselves to these child-athletes and there are people who rise in the business world and value their employees simply for what they do. They represent their job titles accurately, rather than as euphemisms for dictators, owners, pimps and tyrants etc. For these virtuous individuals, this passage is an affirmation. They, like Paul, are making a selfless difference in the world where we all benefit.

The better choice in our capitalistic system that rewards selfish individualism should be obvious. It appears the choice between compassion over exploitation was obvious to Paul and his followers in their Roman-ruled culture. On one hand if Paul and Silas agreed with the cry of stalking woman, that Paul and his crew were indeed sent by God, they could throw her some business. In turn, they could increase their own following and satisfy her owners by allowing their gift pimping. Then everyone could make decisions that are good for their own families!

But...this woman was made a prostitute! And her owners were pimps.

As a side note, the major focus of Bible commentary for this story is the emphasis on the article used in the phrase "a way" versus "The Way of salvation" in competing translations.

In some translations the woman cries, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you *the* way of salvation." In others it's "A way" of salvation. If you are a fundamentalist, "The Way" will reinforce good feelings of an exclusive God, and it would explain Paul being annoyed.

This woman in Acts was not saying anything different from Paul. Forget this hyper-focus on the article used! This woman was being prostituted and owned as a slave. Or should I say, The slave. Do you see the problem of focusing on the article rather than on the subject?

Paul didn't say, "Woman, how dare you use the article 'A' instead of 'The'! Come out of her, you article demon! Thus sayeth a god."

Don't get me wrong. I realize how important it is to recognize articles when understanding an author's intent. But what is obviously most important here is the well-being of a woman who is being forced to use her gift for someone else's profit.

Now maybe she attended Macedonia Christian University as an English major and Paul thought she should have known better. But for some reason, I doubt it. If you're wondering if I'm taking a shot at some private Christian schools, well...if the article fits, delete it. I can tell you from my own experience the extent to which institutions will go to compete against other Christian and non-Christian institutions, cater to donors, and

exploit talents, all in the name of increasing attendance and garnering their share of sports revenues and academic grants.

Don't forget: Paul also had a gift. This slave was not the only one who had gifts. Paul would not be so easily taken by the legalistic mindset of his culture. He was counterculture. So was she. But she was true to her gift when she endorsed Paul. Perhaps she longed for a way of salvation from her slave owners. Maybe the demon that was exorcised was the demon of enslavement.

I think Paul saw that she was being spiritually abused by her owners. It appears Mary Magdalene was not the only prostitute in the Bible. In the full definition of prostitute, there have been and are, many of them, both men and women.

I remember hearing the late sociologist and preacher, Tony Campolo, telling those of us gathered, "You may want to be a doctor or lawyer. Truth is, there are more than enough doctors and lawyers in the world. If you're going to be a doctor or a lawyer, do it to make a difference in the world!" I never forgot that. The same could be said for most every occupation.

The woman in Acts probably was new to this message Paul was preaching and perhaps it was "The" God who gave her the wisdom to say to others, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." Perhaps she was annoying them on purpose. It may have been a cry for her own freedom.

It makes me wonder, as I look at my life, how often I may have prostituted my gifts. How have I debased my talents, with egoistic intent, unworthy of the good news that saved me from the exploitation of others?

Jesus prayed for us saying, "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them." (John 17:25,26)

Perhaps it was the woman's gift that made Paul known to her. Then Paul's gift made her known to him. Then the gift of God was made known to them and us.

May this be the earthquake that violently shakes our prison doors.

**Amen**

## Opening Song

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

### **Calm Me Lord**

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.  
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

## Bible Passage

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## Touchpoint

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

## The Meal

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

## Benediction

### **The Lord Bless You and Keep You**

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lukin)

The Lord blesses you and keeps you.  
The Lord lifts his countenance upon you... And give you peace...  
The Lord makes his face shine upon you...And be gracious unto you...  
The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen