

Acts Series Part 45

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[0 : 00] What upsets you? What distresses you? What provokes in you indignation?

What circumstances disturb you to the core of your being? In summary, what troubles you? Perhaps I should give you a moment to mentally reflect and indeed answer those questions summarized in that final question.

What troubles you? I suspect that the answer to this question, your answer to this question, is a pretty good measure of the man or woman that you are.

What troubles you? What disturbs you? In the passage that we'll be considering this evening as we continue our study through the book of Acts, we will encounter a troubled man.

And we want to examine and to consider this troubled man and very particularly what it is that causes his troubled state.

[1 : 17] Well, let's read together in Acts chapter 16. Acts chapter 16, and we'll read from verse 16. We'll read through to the end of verse 24. Acts chapter 16, reading from verse 16 on page 1112.

Paul and Silas and Luke and Timothy continue in Philippi. Last week we considered how they were directed by God to the place of prayer, and there they met with Lydia and how she was converted, how her heart was opened.

Well, they continue in Philippi. And we pick up the story of their time in Philippi at verse 16 of chapter 16. And we read, She said,

Paul, Paul, Paul presented to us here as a troubled man.

[3 : 55] He became, Luke describes him, he became so troubled. He was so troubled.

The picture here is not of mild annoyance at this slave girl who is pursuing him and interrupting him and causing perhaps a scandal around his mission.

He is not simply irritated by her. He is not simply annoyed by her, though perhaps he was annoyed and irritated. What is described here is something that goes beyond mild irritation.

He became so troubled, we are told. Why was he troubled? Why was he troubled? Why was he troubled?

And what can we learn from his troubled state? This is what will occupy our attention this evening. Why was Paul so troubled? Why was Paul so troubled?

[4 : 51] And what can we learn from this? I want to notice four elements here. There will be one in particular where we will concentrate our attention. But four elements that we can consider.

First of all, and very, very believably, just to consider the circumstances of his trouble. Or to put it another way, what is he doing that brings him into this troubled state?

Secondly, and this is where we will dwell a little longer, the cause of his trouble. Why is he so troubled? But then thirdly, we want to consider the response or his response to his trouble.

To that which is producing this troubled state. What does he do in response to that which troubles him? And then finally, and this very briefly, the reward, his reward for a right response to his trouble.

Well, as we go through these elements, all a bit of a tongue twister, but hopefully as we consider them each in turn, it will become clearer. First of all, the circumstances of his trouble.

[6 : 05] And really the point here that I want to make very briefly is that Paul is engaged, actively and committedly engaged in the Lord's work.

He and those who accompany him are being obedient to the call that they had received to preach the gospel in Philippi. There in verse 10 of this self-same chapter, we notice how they had concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel in Macedonia, in Philippi in particular.

And Paul and his companions are being obedient to that call. They are engaged actively in the Lord's work. Now, if Paul had remained in Antioch, life perhaps would have been a lot less stressful for him, a lot less upsetting.

Perhaps he wouldn't have been so troubled there as he became here in Philippi. Indeed, perhaps, if we can speculate a little, had he limited himself even being in Philippi to sharing the gospel with those who were interested in the message at the place of prayer that is made reference to here.

Indeed, that is where they were heading. Had he only spoken there to maybe a small group of interested individuals, the women who are mentioned and maybe others who might join them, perhaps he would have saved himself a lot of stress and a lot of trouble.

[7 : 36] But that was not his calling. But that was not his calling. And we can be sure that Paul and those who accompanied him sought and made use of every opportunity to speak the good news concerning Jesus, not only to those who wished to hear, but also to those for whom this message provoked anger and opposition and violent response.

The trouble that he faces, the trouble that he experiences, that I'm sure was not a pleasant experience for him, is because he is engaged in the Lord's work.

And to just draw out a very simple lesson from that, if you want a quiet and trouble-free life, then don't follow Jesus.

Don't do it. Don't do it. If that is what you are looking for, a life where you can be shielded from upset and trouble and distress, then following Jesus is not a good option for you.

If you are to follow Jesus in a coherent and a committed way, be assured that there will be trouble on the way for you.

[8 : 53] That was certainly true for Paul, and I'm sure it is also true for all who would be faithful, committed disciples of Jesus Christ. But moving on to what is of greater interest to us this evening, and that is to consider the cause of his trouble. We read there in the descriptive account that we are given by Luke, that the circumstances were that there was this slave girl who was following them. We read there in verse 18, picking up the account, she kept this up for many days.

Finally, Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the Spirit, and then what? It follows. The cause of his trouble revolves around this character who is presented to us, this slave girl. It revolves around this slave girl and the evil that oppressed and exploited her, and the evil that unchecked would ultimately destroy her. This is the cause of his trouble.

We will notice in a moment that it would be quite unfair to say it's the slave girl. She's the cause of the trouble. It revolves around her. She is the means, if you wish, but that which troubles him goes beyond simply this poor victim of evil that is this slave girl. In fact, I would suggest that we can identify four aspects of this evil that are the cause of Paul's deep trouble and distress.

I'll mention what the four are, and then we can think of them each in turn. First of all, an evil spirit. An evil spirit is the cause of Paul being so troubled, but also evil words. Evil words that we'll see are authored by this same evil spirit. An evil spirit troubles him. Evil words trouble him.

Evil men trouble him. We'll notice who they are in a moment, but also evil's victim, an evil's victim being this poor slave girl mentioned in this account. These are the things that trouble Paul, I would suggest. It's true that in this descriptive account of what happened, Luke doesn't choose to tell us explicitly the cause of Paul being so troubled. We have to somehow, as we would consider the passage and as we would consider what we know about Paul, come to a conclusion or perhaps a number of conclusions or possibilities that together I think we can reasonably suggest are the cause of Paul's troubled state. First of all, an evil spirit. Now, there can be no doubt if we are, as I believe we are, committed to the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures as being true in all that they tell us. If that is our conviction as it is, there can be no doubt that the girl mentioned here was under the influence of an evil spirit. Now, we are conscious that the very suggestion that such beings exist would be a source of some amusement to many. And indeed, some Bible commentators prefer to understand the incident described here as the fact that the people who are not being able to understand the truth of the evil spirit. And in that way, they would seek to remove the spiritual element of the reality of this evil spirit that is spoken of.

[12 : 56] However, we cannot accept that conclusion. If all that we had was what was said in verse 16 concerning who she was and what she did, a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future, if that is all that we had, we might say, well, yes, that's maybe simply how people understood her. That is how they who saw her described her, but it needn't necessarily be so. But as we continue reading, we find that Luke describes the confrontation between the evil spirit and Paul in personal terms.

Paul addresses the evil spirit. The spirit responds to the words that Paul addresses to him. And there is no doubt that what is being presented to us is a personal being, an evil spirit who is oppressing this poor young girl. Evil spirits do exist. Indeed, we can say that the very evil spirit that was oppressing this slave girl that is described to us this evening in the passage before us, this self-same evil spirit, exists today, still alive and kicking and seeking to destroy today. For evil spirits are created, personal, immortal beings. And as such, this self-same evil spirit today exists. We don't know where, we don't know what he's doing, but we know that he's up to no good, seeking to destroy and to kill and to bring suffering and pain on some poor soul, such as was the case with this slave girl.

Evil spirits explained to us in the Scriptures as fallen angels who rebelled against God under the leadership of Lucifer. We read in Revelation chapter 12, a passage that I think we can conclude describes, describes certainly in very dramatic and perhaps we might say poetic terms, a real occasion, a real event, of this rebellion of Lucifer and a host of angels. And they were cast from heaven that they might inhabit this earth and seek to do the bidding of Lucifer, created, personal, immortal beings.

And as enemies of Jesus Christ, as enemies of the seed of the woman, and particularly this evil spirit as an enemy of Jesus Christ, he is the cause, or certainly one of the causes of Paul's troubled state.

Why is Paul so troubled? Because he is aware that there is this evil spirit who hates Jesus and who opposes the purposes of Jesus and who hates the people who he is oppressing. He is alive and active, and this disturbs him. And as we consider that, and maybe this whole area is one that we feel very uncomfortable with or certainly unfamiliar with, but surely we can at the very least ask this question as we would apply this to ourselves. Are we disturbed by the forces of evil? Are we even aware of their intense activity in our midst? Paul was so disturbed, and he was so disturbed certainly in part because of the activity of this evil spirit. But he was disturbed also by evil words.

[17 : 03] Now this of course is related necessarily to the evil spirit, for the evil spirit is the author of these words. But as we think of the words themselves in distinction from the one who utters them, the activity of the evil spirit is made evident, among other things, by the words that the slave girl utters. Now here there can be some debate as to whether it is the girl who is speaking. It is described in those terms as she is the one who is speaking. Or, and it may seem a very difficult distinction, if it is the evil spirit who, in a manner we don't fully understand, takes possession of her faculty of speech and speaks through her. It is interesting, though we don't have time to dwell on this, that the word used in verse 16 to describe her as having a spirit is a word that is also used, or can also be used to mean a ventriloquist. And that would suggest that perhaps the sound that she made was a sound that for those who would hear it, they would have said, well that's not her voice, that's not her speaking.

It sounded as if it was somebody else speaking. Well, as I say, we don't need to get bogged down as to what might have been the mechanics of this, what we can say. And the bottom line is that it is the evil spirit that is responsible for what is being said by this poor girl. But why do we say evil words?

What are the words that she pronounces? Well, we have them there in verse 17. This girl 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. These are the words that so disturb Paul. And we're describing them as evil words. And you might say, well, there's nothing evil about them. They're true words. And of course they are true. This is a feature of evil spirits concerning Jesus. They tell the truth. They recognize who he is. Indeed, the ability to discern who Jesus is is also an indication of there being a very real personal evil spirit involved in this account. His perception was much greater than the average Philippian citizen who was following the movements of Paul and his companions. But why do we say evil words? The words are true. These men were indeed servants of the Most High God. They were indeed telling the people of Philippi the way to be saved. Why then do we describe them as evil words? Well, I would say for two reasons. First of all, though they are true, they are spoken blasphemously by one who does not bow down to worship the one he identifies. Though what he says is true, they are not spoken of in worship. And these words, though true, when they are spoken in these mocking terms, become evil words, though the content is accurate. That in itself is something for us to ponder on solemnly, that we can say things that are true. But if when we are speaking especially of God and of His Son,

Jesus Christ, that the true words we speak would be spoken in the right spirit, in a spirit of worship and adoration, this was not so here. For that reason, the blasphemous manner in which God's name is voiced by this girl, by the Spirit through this girl, they become, if you wish, evil words. But another reason, and of course it's related, why we can describe them as evil words, is that the intention of this girl pursuing Paul and speaking these words, the intention, we probably would have to say it would seem, but the intention it would seem is to disrupt the work that they are doing. The intention it would seem is to bring the missionaries into disrepute by the scandal that would be created by this woman, this young girl, chasing after them and shouting after them in these mocking tones.

This is the purpose of the word. They're true words, but they are uttered in mocking tones. You might imagine, I don't know if you've ever been involved in maybe a mission activity in somewhere in some town, and there's a work with teenagers, and you're trying to get them in, and they know that it's the God squad. And so there is the banter, oh, are you going to tell us how to be saved? And joking, and often mocking the message that is being brought. The words that they say might be true, but the manner in which they're being said lead us to another conclusion as to how we can describe these words. Well, certainly these words can be described as evil words, and they greatly disturb Paul to hear the name of his God, the one he adores, being spoken of in blasphemous and mocking tones. What about us? Are we disturbed when the name of God is blasphemed, when the gospel of Jesus Christ is presented in mocking terms? Or are we so desensitized to what we hear very often, certainly in the media, on TV, and round about us, that we are less and less disturbed by evil words? Paul was so disturbed by the evil spirit himself, by the evil words that he utters, but he was disturbed also,

[23 : 08] I would suggest, by evil men. Now, some may choose to doubt the existence of evil spirits. Well, that is the prerogative of each to come to their own conclusions. But can any plausibly doubt the existence of evil men? And there certainly are evil men in this account before us, the evil men. And we presume that they were men, though some might accuse me of being sexist, for we're not told. But the evil men are described as the owners of this slave girl. There we're told there in verse 16, she earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This poor slave girl was the property of these men to be used and abused for their financial gain. That was their only concern for her. They had no concern for her other than what they could get out of her. She was oppressed and abused and exploited by these evil men. Wicked, evil men. And we can be sure that Paul knew of the existence of these evil men. We're not told if he had any encounter with them before they protest once the evil spirit has been cast out from the woman. Certainly at the point at which Paul is described as being so disturbed, we don't know if Paul had met these men. But we can be reasonably certain that he would have known of their existence.

He would have known that there were men such as these men who abused and oppressed and sought gain from the suffering and the misery of others. And I am sure that he was disturbed by these evil men and the suffering that they were causing for this poor young girl.

He is troubled by man's profound capacity for evil. He is troubled by man's finely honed capacity to oppress and to abuse and to demean others. And man has not changed. These remain the capacities and the practice of so many men today also. And I ask the question, are we troubled by evil men and women who practice their evil that others might suffer?

But there is one final element as we draw to a close this question. Why was Paul so troubled? And it is this, evil's victim. We've already spoken of this as we've considered the other elements. Evil's victim is this young girl. In the middle of all this evil is a poor victim, a real person, a young girl with a name and a heart and a soul, a real flesh and blood human being who is hurting and suffering indescribably.

That may not be what appeared as she would confidently follow Paul and spout forth her taunting words.

[26 : 35] But she is a woman who is suffering. She is a victim of the evil spirit, a victim of these evil men. And I am sure Paul is troubled by her suffering. He's not irritated by her, but he is troubled by the manner in which she is suffering, troubled by the pain that sin engenders in her poor life.

And again, the question must be posed, what about us? We live in a sin-sick world with many victims who suffer deeply and profoundly, and does such suffering trouble us? Paul became so troubled.

But what does he do? What is the response of Paul to his troubled state, or more particularly, the circumstances that produce this troubled state? What does Paul do in the face of this distressing and troubling evil? This is the question that now occupies us. Well, he does something.

And even if we pause there just for the briefest of moments, he does something. One option, perhaps, was to do nothing, to hasten his step, to change his route, to avoid the issue, to not get involved. It was bound to be messy. One option was to avoid doing anything for this poor girl.

But no, Paul does something. And what does he do? Well, we read there in verse 18. He turned round and said to the Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her.

[28 : 19] And at that moment, the Spirit left her. He challenges evil head on. He confronts evil in the name and in the power of Jesus Christ. We know how Jesus had granted to His disciples the authority to drive out evil spirits. We read of that in Matthew's gospel. And Paul here exercises this authority as he is confronted by the evil spirit. It's worth noting that Paul doesn't seek out the evil spirit to confront him. Quite the reverse. He would seem to be avoiding confrontation as long as he can, until he can resist no longer the provocation of the evil spirit. We're told how she kept this up for many days.

Finally, Paul became so troubled. He wasn't looking for trouble. He wasn't looking to engage the forces of darkness, but they engaged him. And there came a point where he could say, I can say silent no longer.

And laying hold of the authority that he had been granted by his Lord, he commands the evil spirit to depart from her. And that is precisely what he does. And in doing something, the slave girl, this poor slave girl is delivered from the oppression of the evil spirit. And we imagine, though we are not told, delivered also from the oppression of her owners as she now has nothing to offer them.

She has nothing to offer them. She can make them no money. And so we presume that she was also freed from their oppression. Might it be, and of course here we engage only in sheer speculation, might it be that a Lydia? Would have been willing to buy the freedom of this slave girl from these men? Wouldn't have been a high price to pay now? No longer able to do her fancy work? Well, we don't know. But she is freed from the oppression of the evil spirit, and we are sure freed awful from the oppression of her evil owners.

We're not even told if she is brought to faith in Jesus. But the manner in which her story is sandwiched between the stories of Lydia and of the Philippian dealer certainly do suggest that she was indeed saved. Paul did something. What about us? What do we do? Now, we might say as we listen to this talk of evil spirits, and we say, well, we live in a different age, surely. No slave girls today? Oh, yes.

[30 : 56] Yes. Slavery is alive and kicking. Last week in Britain, the police freed 103 children in Ilford, victims of a Romanian child trafficking network. This week that has passed, slaves, young children, victims of evil men. Many of the prostitutes who sell their bodies on our streets are slaves of evil men, men, often brought from other lands to ply their trade and to make money for evil men. Our day is not so different from the day that we are reading of in our passage this evening. Are we disturbed? Do we do anything? Do we still have the delegated authority of Jesus to confront and defeat evil? Surely we do.

But slavery takes many forms and evil spirits operate in many ways. That same spirit who oppressed this young girl, how is he operating today? We don't know. But we can be sure that they operate in many ways.

We are surrounded by slaves, slaves of drink and drugs, slaves of sex and pleasure, slaves of money and status. And does their plight disturb us? And do we do anything if we are disturbed? Human beings are exploited and abused in many ways. So many massacred even before they see the light of day by the shame and evil that is abortion on demand paid for by our own taxes. Our elderly are next in line to be victims. Victims of those who would seek to facilitate and accelerate their end of life.

Does this disturb us? Do we do anything? Paul's response to his troubled state, he does something.

But finally, and with this we close, what is Paul's reward for a right and courageous response to his troubled state? And more than his troubled state, the circumstances that produced his troubled state. What is his reward? Does Paul get a medal? Is he thanked and praised? Well, his reward, and listen carefully here, his reward is more trouble. More trouble, that's his reward. We've read what happened to him. We pick up the story in verse 22, the crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. This is Paul's reward. This is Paul's reward for freeing this woman from the oppression that she was under.

[33 : 47] And so be warned. That is often the reward for those who would confront the devil and his minions. Those who would denounce and oppose evil and oppression and injustice. This often is their reward.

Was it worth it? Was it worth it? Does Paul wish that he had kept quiet and not rocked the boat? Well, the answer to that question is eloquently given in verse 25. About midnight, languishing in this inner cell. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Does it appear as if Paul regretted what he did?

Is Paul lamenting the reward that he receives? No. He is in a much less troubled state, deep in the prison cell than he was in freedom walking the streets of Philippi. Walking in freedom the streets of Philippi, he was so troubled by the evil spirit, so troubled by evil men, so troubled by this victim of evil. But here in the prison cell, he is praying and singing praise to God.

Yes, his reward is more trouble, but he doesn't regret it for a moment. And I close as I began. What upsets you? What distresses you? What provokes in you indignation? What circumstances disturb you to the core of your being? In summary, what troubles you?

What do you do? The answer to this question is a pretty good measure of a man or a woman. Let us pray. What is the threat to this question? Yeah, that's a great question.

[35 : 43] Has it made a question? Will I tahu or maybe tell you the more ■■■■ Unger or how over the above constitutions are a woman? Because I sort of think of a woman when the brain changes on screen and going after you make her voice, is it days-to-by- Benedetti? And cannot come? It reminds me of the different practices of Palestine. It is a quite a■ of a favorite inspiration from you.

Good example.