

- **Our central passage today- from Acts 16- is a stark picture of human suffering that flows from the fallen nature of humanity- the inevitable result of human condition apart from God and Christ.**
- **As we go through this today, I want us to ask the question- As disciples of Jesus, HOW ARE WE DIFFERENT? What is the...**

✠ **The essential result of being a New Creation**

- **Last week we ended with passage from Ephesians 2. Contrasts what was true of us before redeemed by Christ, and what is now true of us IN CHRIST.**

Ephesians 2:12-13 ...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- **We who were far away from God and His goodness have been brought near to God and his goodness. That's a miracle. That is something God did, and the implications of this are profound.**
- **SO, question. WHAT HAS CHANGED for us now that we have been brought near to God?**
 - **Hope of eternity**
 - **Freedom of total forgiveness before God**
 - **New identity- New SOURCE, Christ is our life**
 - **These are INTERNAL realities- what is true of us In Christ, and there are many more.**
- **But what about EXTERNALLY? As disciples of Jesus- What are essential changes in how we live, relate, and engage with our situations in life, specifically with other people? Term is ETHICS.**
- **And Friends- NT proclaims that as BY FAITH we live in dependence upon Christ as our SOURCE of life- our ETHICS will be a reflection of the NATURE and CHARACTER of God.**
- **SO, that leads to THIS question...**

What is the key distinction between the functional ethics of the human condition and the ethics of the nature and character of God?

- **Jesus answers this question in a famous encounter we have recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke- reading here from Mark: Jesus has just been asked what is the greatest commandment in the Law...**

Mark 12:29-31 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

- **"NO COMMANDMENT greater than these"... in other words, if you violate this command- to love God and EXPRESS your love of God by how you love your neighbor- if you fail there, your obedience in any other moral area is meaningless. If that sounds extreme, go read 1 Corinthians 13.**
- **In Matthews account of this, Jesus says "ALL the law and the prophets hang on these two commands"**

- **Famously, in Luke’s account, “expert in the law” then followed up with “okay... so who is my neighbor?” Jesus responded with what may be the most famous parable in scripture, the Good Samaritan.**
- **Our neighbor- who we are called and equipped by the Spirit to value and sacrificially love- is the lowest among us. The weakest among us. The most different among us- the most hated among us.**
- **DISTILL THIS DOWN... There are MANY ethical distinctives that express the character and nature of God. BUT ONE OF THE GREATEST is the INHERENT God endowed VALUE of every human life.**
- **Because this is true, one of the greatest OFFENSES, or VIOLATIONS of the nature and character of God is to use a place of power to exploit, abuse, denigrate, objectify, or in any way treat as ‘less than’ another human being- for our own selfish purposes.**
- **THIS brings us to the second divine appointment Paul and Silas experience in ACTS 16. Last week Paul unexpectedly met and shared the gospel with Lydia, a wealthy businesswoman. Today, we travel to the opposite end of the spiritual and socio-economic spectrum, as Paul and Silas encounter...**

† From a wealthy businesswoman to a possessed slave girl.

Acts 16:16 *Once 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.*

- **Lets talk about this girl- she had a spirit enabling her to predict the future- ‘spirit of divination’. Literal greek is ‘pnuema pythona’- spirit of the python- this phrase is connect to the mythology surrounding famous Oracle of Delphi. But Luke makes it clear this not a con job- she is under control of an evil spirit that dominates her, allowing her owners to exploit her for their profit.**
- **There’s a real sense of darkness surrounding the plight of this young woman- she is a double victim- victimized by the power of this spirit, and victimized by the callous greed of her owners.**
- **If anyone in Philippi had reason to hate or resent God because of their plot in life, it was her. Her life was one of misery, over which she had no control.**
- **And then, for the second time here in Philippi, God intervenes in an unexpected way- a way Paul almost seems to resist- Luke basically tells us that Paul was-**

† Annoyed into action

Acts 16:17-18 *She 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.”¹⁸ She 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.*

- **Imagine this scene. Not pleasant. Girl is shouting, making a scene. Paul is trying ignore this activity, not wanting to cause a stir.**
- **Meanwhile, the girl’s statement is confusing. In English it sounds like she is basically giving Paul’s message. Why would he be annoyed?**
- **Remember- this was an overwhelmingly polytheistic Romanized Greek city- phrase “most high God” was a term used for their own Gods. It’s possible she was mocking them, saying their God was great, but just one of many Roman Gods.**

- Also, phrase “the way to be saved” could also be translated “a way to be saved”. Sense is while she is drawing attention to Paul and his team, she is greatly detracting from what they were trying to do.
- Word “annoyed” is also interesting- Paul was clearly irritated, but Greek word carries greater connotation of being troubled and burdened. What Paul witnesses greatly disturbs him- not just because she is detracting from their work, but because he is troubled by her state of spiritual bondage.
- And so, In the name of Jesus, Paul commands the evil spirit to leave her... which it does. The young woman is freed.
- THIS BRINGS UP topic very foreign to our modern worldview, and that is the power of Jesus over the reality of demonic forces. We see this in the Gospels, and we will see it again in Acts- SO, we will set this aside right now and explore the topic in depth when we get to those later passages.
- THIS is all that we know about the girl! We don’t know her response to these events, only that she was freed by God from the spirit that dominated her... and from what happens next, it appears she was cast aside by her owners. MY SPECULATION- but I think she was taken in and cared for by the new community of believers at Lydia’s house.
- Likely REASON we aren’t told more about her is Luke changes his focus to perpetrators of girls bondage...
- HERE WE SEE stark contrast between the corrupt ethics endemic to fallen humanity, and ethics that flow from nature and character of God

† A stark contrast... **Finish out this part of the story**

Acts 16:19-24 When 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. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- **OK- IN THIS STORY, HOW do we see ...**

The human condition- contrasted- Heart of Christ in us

Human Condition: Uses power to exploit

- Roman law and culture allowed these men to exploit this young woman. But it was greed, pride, and a low value of human life that led to her bondage.
- May not be legalized slavery today, but we see these forces very much at play in our culture- be it at the level of a marriage and family or the larger scale economic and social issues of our country.
- MUST SAY- tragic stain on the church that sexual harassment/ assault- not to mention racism and different forms of discrimination- remain present and even tolerated within parts of church culture today.
- This is not a political issue- it is one of the most fundamental moral and ethical matters of a Biblical and Christ-centered worldview.

Christ in us: Uses power (influence) to redeem

- *Freedom and redemption are at the absolute heart of the gospel- and this isn't just about eternal salvation. The heart of Christ in us will lead us to contend for liberty and redemption wherever we see it lacking, starting in our own communities.*
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Human Condition: Goes along with the exploiters

- *Subtle, but fact these men were making money from exploitation of girl means they had customers. These people weren't directly holding the girl in bondage, but by their complicit actions they also displayed a low view of human worth. CONTRAST*

Christ in us: Resists benefiting from suffering of others

- *Where we see injustice, we will resist it- even if turning a blind eye is far easier.*
- *As people with heart of Christ, this calls for an intentional awareness of culture and society, with a desire to not even passively participate in what may be demeaning or devaluing to another person.*

Human Condition: Devalues integrity to protect self

- *Easy to miss- first thing girls owners did was play the race card. "These men are Jews"-*
- *Antisemitism is as old as history itself, but this cuts closer to home. ANY TIME we pass judgment or devalue a person due to their class, race, or any other identity distinction, we are violating this greatest ethical principle of God's nature.*
- *ALSO- These men are also lying about why upset with Paul. Don't care about civic peace or roman customs... furious because money making scheme has ended! SO to protect own interests, they are abandoning honesty and integrity.*

Christ in us: Values truth and honesty above protecting/ advancing self

- *This too calls for intentional self-awareness. We love to accuse those we disagree with of dishonesty to support their agenda. But so tempting and easy to actively or passively tolerate intellectual dishonesty if it supports our agenda or confirms our biases.*
 - *In ethics that flow from CHRIST IN US, we will not compromise our integrity by what we say or agree with just because it may gratify us, benefit us or get us what I want in short run.*
 - *Growing up mentors say to me- "Your integrity is all you have"... Integrity is NOT all we have, but it is an indispensable result of WHOSE WE ARE.*
 - *Paul may not use the word, but Intellectual honesty is a fruit of the Spirit- and it is in short supply today, including within parts of Christian culture.*
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Human Condition: Fears the crowd

- *The authorities in Philippi abused Paul and Silas to appease the crowd. Seen this multiple times in Acts. "Going along with the crowd" in order to protect ourselves is one of the most common attributes of our flesh. IN CONTRAST*

Christ in us: Godly courage when facing the crowd

- *Oh... much could be talked about here. Going against the crowd, especially our peers, is hard. Leave this with Peters' words from 1 Peter 3:14 "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord"*

Human Condition: Perpetrates injustice to benefit self

- *This is the core sin in this story, and it is one of the core sins of humanity. BUT IN CONTRAST*

Christ in us: Endures injustice to benefit others

- *Striking- Paul and Silas don't resist injustice being perpetrated upon them- and they COULD HAVE...*
- *Instead, possibly to avoid turning attention back on the young woman, they endure severe mistreatment, strengthened by a deep conviction God was at work, and their suffering would bring others to God. As we will see next week, this is exactly what happened.*
- *HEAR! JUST AS injustice to benefit SELF is core sin of human condition, SO ALSO essential attribute of CHRIST IN US is that greater than our desire to defend ourselves from injustice is desire for others to know Christ- for God to be glorified.*
- *That leads to the bottom line, and our last contrast:*

Human Condition: Led by the flesh- *seeks to exalts self... and will devalue others to do so.*

Christ in us: Led by the Spirit- exalts God.

- *Circling all way back to Jesus' great commandment: a person who loves and exalts God FIRST will NEVER power or influence to take advantage of OR elevate themselves above another person.*
- *To do so is failure to love- violation of greatest commandment, and turning out back on principle leadership of Christ's spirit in us.*
- *END WITH THIS. Just like Paul and these first century believers, we live in a culture where at times it seems "No good deed goes unpunished. All around us is fear, animosity to people who are different, lack of integrity, and a devaluing of human life.*
- *Tragically, these characteristics are not limited to "secular" society, but also can be found within Christian culture.*
- *In the midst of this reality, how will the Spirits presence lead us- those who have been brought near to God by the Blood of Christ- how will Christ in us lead- and give us the power- to live?*
- *Prayerfully listen as we read Romans 12:9-21. Later today go back and read the whole chapter. In my NIV this passage is entitled...*

✠ Love in Action

Romans 12:9-21 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.