

A Slave Girl

A study of Acts 16:16-34

Song: Great things the Lord has done
Found on the World Day of Prayer CD.

Prayer: (spontaneous)

Introduction

This is a well-known passage from the book of Acts in which Paul and Silas are imprisoned and made to suffer a great deal because of their faith and their steadfast proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Despite their mistreatment and false arrest, Paul and Silas slowly transform the minds and hearts of their captors and others who are imprisoned through their deep sense of faith and especially their behaviour. We read that at about midnight, Paul and Silas are praising God in song, and prisoners are listening to them.

BACKGROUND

The text Acts 16:16-34, relates a connected story in three parts, each of which teaches us a life lesson as Christians.

PART ONE: Acts 16:16-18

Read the text.

While Paul and Silas are on their way to a place of prayer, they meet a slave girl who has the gift of divination or “fortune telling”. We read that her service to others came with a fee that went to her owners. It is this same gift that gives her insight into the faith of Paul and Silas, which she proclaims loudly for many days. Finally, Paul gets annoyed and casts out the demon that brought the gift

of divination to the girl.

The question to ask ourselves is this: was the girl wrong in her proclamation? The answer is not as clear cut as it seems. From what we know of Paul in the New Testament, he was not a person who was enticed by praise. Paul immediately understood the girl’s plight and considered her gift as spiritual slavery and exploitation by her slave masters.

Conditions of Girl Child in Cameroon

In our country, Cameroon, young children are exploited in many ways. The girl child is highly affected. Most exploited girl children come from poor homes and are given out to wealthy families to serve as housemaids where they are subjected to very harsh conditions with little or no care nor adequate compensation for their round-the-clock services. They are denied their human rights and rendered sub-human. They undergo torture from their mistresses; some are raped by their masters and threatened to keep silence. Cases of rape sometimes result in unwanted teenage pregnancies and abandonment. Other girls are sent out at an early age as street vendors and hawkers. They are sometimes sexually abused by their male customers. This is done through intimidation or wooing with inconsequential gifts of sweets, biscuits, or small amounts of money. Some girl children suffer sexual harassment in schools from teachers and male counterparts. Some teachers threaten to fail attractive girls if they refuse to grant them sexual favours. More often than not, this leads to unwanted teenage pregnancies and even more serious problems. Many

others drop out of school because of poverty. There are others still who are victims of trafficking, a new form of slavery indeed. We invite you, our sisters and brothers all over the world, to join us in praying for humanitarian organizations who are fighting these ills in our society and country.

In Luke 4:18, it reads that Jesus and those who followed after him had come “to proclaim release to the captives... to let the oppressed go free.” The slave girl in Acts was imprisoned by a spirit of divination and so Paul extended salvation as release and freedom for the girl. To do so, Paul had to ignore the praise showered on him and do the right thing.

Questions for Reflection

Throughout the world, the girl child faces many issues. What are some issues that you did not know about before?

Lesson #1

We should always strive to do the right thing even when it means silencing the many praise singers that permeate our church women’s groups and make our heads swell

PART TWO: Acts 16:19-24

Read the text

The second event results from Paul’s action. The owners of the slave girl realize that she has lost her powers of divination and they have lost their source of income. In their anger, aided by the crowd, they seize Paul and Silas and bring them before the magistrates, who charge them with disturbing the peace. They are stripped, flogged, and thrown into prison. What is interesting here is that even though Paul and Silas have been praying, witnessing, and sharing the gospel

in the community where they healed the demon-possessed girl (thus threatening the income of the slave masters), the same crowd turns against them.

Lesson #2

This part of the story tells us that doing the right thing is not always appreciated. This scenario is real, it happens in our women’s groups and society, and it happens to us as leaders. Sometimes we are surprised by the negative attitudes of those whom we thought we were helping. At other times we can anticipate that our colleagues will not be happy with our decision. But we must also be reminded by the example of Paul and Silas that if we follow the crowd, we lose our principles and integrity. Paul and Silas were slaves to the “Most High God” as the slave girl had declared and not to the approval of other human beings. Does that mean that we do not take others’ opinions into consideration as we go about our daily duties? No. It simply means we may anticipate positive and negative responses but will always act with as much spiritual integrity as possible.

PART THREE: Acts 16: 25-34

Read the text

This section focuses on how Paul and Silas react to their imprisonment. We are told that they are “praying and singing hymns to God.” To them, God is reality, and they believe in their hearts that God is with them even in their imprisonment and mistreatment. More importantly, they believe that God will use their imprisonment as an opportunity for them to witness to God’s power and might. As they pray and sing, we learn from the text that the prisoners are listening to them.