
CLAIMING YOUR MINISTRY

The first lesson today from Acts 16 is one of my favorites because I think it provides a valid argument for sprinkling in baptism, rather than only immersion.

After Paul and Silas witnessed to the jailer, he became a believer.

- Then we're told that he washed their wounds, likely with a basin of water,
 - and that immediately, he and all his family were baptized.
- I believe that "immediately" means they used that very same basin of water, so that they had to be sprinkled with the water.
- I also believe that if it really mattered to GOD how we are baptized, GOD would have made it much clearer.

What I want to talk about today, though, is something else with which I think this passage can help us.

How do we take what we hear in this place and apply it to our lives out there?

- Certainly, we need to know with whom we are in relationship before we go out there.
- But I think is just as important that we think about where we are and who is around us when we're out there,
 - and doing that can help you to claim your ministry.

My daughter, Rebekah, tells me that one of the things the Marine Corps teaches is called "situational awareness":

- recognizing the location of the people in your area and thinking about your environment—where you are and what is needed—when you enter into a situation.
 - For Marines, that helps you to not shoot one of your own group.
 - For Christians, that means realizing that you are carrying on your conversation in the doorway, and that no one else can get in or out.

Situational awareness is important if you are going to claim your ministry.

- This reading from Acts is a great example of what I'm talking about.

So, let's start by thinking about the people in the story:

1) First, there's the girl.

We are told that she is a slave, possessed of a spirit.

- She has no control over her life:
 - her owners control her,
 - and a spirit controls her.
- Like too many today, she is being used by others.

2) Then there's the spirit.

- Not the HOLY SPIRIT.
- This is a demon who tells the future through her—a psychic, if you will.

I don't know what you think about psychics, but maybe you remember the Psychic Friends Network created by Dionne Warwick back in the early 1990's.

- They went bankrupt in 1998.
 - Odd. You'd think they would have seen that coming, right?

This spirit made the girl follow Paul and Silas around, claiming that they were “slaves of the MOST HIGH GOD.”

- We are not told why she was saying that, though it is likely she was either ridiculing them, or trying to get them into trouble.

3) Then there are the owners of the girl.

- They are making money off her, not unlike the slave trade market today.
 - After the girl is healed of her demon by Paul, which you would think is a good thing, they complain to the authorities that Paul and Silas are “advocating customs unlawful for us to practice.”
 - Really? Is this their concern?
 - Or might their concern actually be about money.
- Isn't it common today for people to be concerned about the needs of others, until, that is, those needs start cutting into their own personal needs or wants?

4) Finally, there is the jailer.

- This poor guy is just trying to do his job.
- He's simply trying to follow the instructions of the magistrates.
 - So, he locked up Paul and Silas, putting them in the center of the jail—the most secure area—and in chains.

Unfortunately for him, GOD sends an earthquake that sets the prisoners free.

- He is sure that they must have escaped, so he plans to kill himself.
 - You see, this would be far less painful than crucifixion, which is what the Romans would do to him for losing his prisoners.

In addition to being aware of the people in the area—in this story—it's also as important for us as it was for them to think about where GOD had placed them as they claimed their ministry.

1) What was their ministry when they were being followed by the girl?

- They are aware that the girl has no control.
- She is at the mercy of her owners and, more importantly, Satan working through a demon.
- What is the ministry they need to claim?
 - To help this girl by casting out the demon.

GOD's justice calls us sometimes to upset others.

- What do you do when you working for a company with unjust practices?
- What do you do when you hear others or see others expressing racism?
- How do we respond when someone is being controlled without her/his permission?
- How might we intervene to help a child in an abusive situation?
- Where do we see injustice around us and how will we respond?

2) What was the ministry to which GOD was calling Paul and Silas when they were in prison?

- Of all the things they could have done, Paul and Silas sang hymns and prayed so that the other prisoners could hear them.
- Prison simply provided them another opportunity to witness for the LORD, especially in this case to people in prison.

When my late wife, Lori, would go for chemotherapy, she often talked with, and sometimes even prayed with others.

- These cancer patients, feeling trapped in their own prison of fear and doubt, were ministered to by a fellow prisoner, who, truthfully, did not view her illness as a prison.

How many do you know who seem trapped in their own prison?

- a prison of loneliness, or fear, or depression, or addiction?
 - How might the love and hope of JESUS, shared by you, change their lives and set them free?

3) What was their ministry with regard to the jailer?

- This man's life was suddenly a disaster.
 - The consequence of his job, beyond his control, had brought him to the brink of suicide.
 - "What can I do to be saved?"
 - "How can I possibly turn this around?"

The truth is that there was nothing in his power that could get him out of this.

- His life was without hope.
- Yet the good news of JESUS provided him hope beyond this life.
 - It provided him a purpose beyond the everyday.
 - He brought his family to hear the message so that they, too, might be saved.
 - They became believers and were baptized.
 - And they rejoiced in what he had brought to them.

By the way, the next day, GOD moved the magistrates to release Paul and Silas.

- The jailer was saved in more ways than one.

Paul and Silas, however, challenged the unjustness of their beating and imprisonment without trial,

- and the magistrates escorted them out of the prison and treated them with honor and respect,
 - though they did request that they leave the city.

So, now, having thought about the ministry of Paul and Silas in these situations, let us consider, how do we go about claiming our ministry?

Let me suggest some questions to ask.

1) Ask, "Why has GOD placed me here?"

- GOD has invited us to participate in Kingdom work, so we should not be surprised to find a ministry from GOD in every situation, whether at home, work, school, in the community, or with our neighbors.
 - Look around and ask, "Who here needs me?"
 - "What is their situation and what can I tell just by looking at them?"
- And if you are not sure, say a prayer.
 - Ask GOD to show you, who here has a need for JESUS.
 - Who here needs the love of CHRIST to help change them?

2) Next ask, "What is needed?"

- What needs to change?
- Who needs someone to sit and listen to him/her?
- What wrong needs to be righted?
- What lesson needs to be taught?
- What word of hope needs to be spoken?

3) Then consider, "What resources do I have?"

- Why has GOD chosen me to be here now?
- What gifts do I have that can make a difference?
 - You may not be able to address every need that person has, but when you measure their needs against your resources, you will know how to minister.
- Remember, also, that you are not alone.
 - JESUS sent us the HOLY SPIRIT to give us the words we need to speak,
 - and then to make the seeds of those words grow.

4) If you sense a need to minister, but are still unsure about what to do, take a moment to ask, "What is stopping me?"

- Am I afraid to step in or to be rejected?
- Do I lack confidence that I can make a difference?
- Am I worried that I might say the wrong thing, or that they may ask me something I can't answer?

I learned an important lesson from the nurse who was my supervisor when I was working on the adolescent unit of a psychiatric hospital.

- She said to me, "Remember that it took years to make these patients this way.
 - "You won't make them worse in one day, nor will you heal them in one day."

This is true for us as well as we seek to minister, except for one thing that my supervisor didn't understand.

- We enter into our ministry with the power of GOD.
 - This is the power of GOD that changed Saul of Tarsus, the greatest Christian killer in the world into Paul, the greatest Christian maker in the world.
 - This is the power of GOD that set a possessed girl free.
 - This is the power of GOD that brought a jailer and his family to faith and hope.
 - This is the power of GOD that brought you to faith in GOD and led you to say, "Yes," to serving in the name of JESUS.

GOD will not put you in a situation if you *and* the HOLY SPIRIT can't handle it.

- The needs are there and they are real.
- The HOLY SPIRIT is present and is ready.
- It's time to leave the church and enter the mission field.
- It's time for you to claim your ministry!