



A Clash of Kingdoms Session 4

Ray Vander Laan

Ephesians 4:11–16

WHY LEARNING COMMUNITIES?

To develop spiritual character and strength to face *anything* by...

1. Learning anchored in Biblical truth but addressing cultural issues
2. Relationships that connect and blossom even outside the meetings

Remember... it's all about putting God's truth into action in everyday lives

INTRODUCTION

The context for EVERYTHING is the clash of Kingdoms. EVERY-THING!

John 10:10 (ESV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

From the Discovery Guide, pp 151-152.

"The good news that Jesus is Savior and Lord was never meant to be simply a religious message. Being a living example of God's character and ways has always been God's calling for his people..."

1 Peter 2:16 (ESV) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

SESSION 4, "The Philippian Jailer"

Herod the Great built an absolutely magnificent city right on the shore of the Mediterranean. He named it Caesarea by the Sea after his patron Augustus Caesar. It had all the things you'd expect from a Herodian city: a harbor, an arena for the game, a theatre, and a magnificent palace. The lower palace over here has a swimming pool; a fresh water pool out into the salt water of the Mediterranean. Colonnaded garden, staffing places, administrative quarters, and even an audience hall. Kind of a funny feeling to think about being in the room where Herod the Great may have had audiences. He died, and fell to his son Archelaus, whom the Romans deposed around 6 AD. They replaced him with a military governor, and made Caesarea the capital of the province of Judea. So the governor lived here. One of them, Pontius Pilate, would interrogate Jesus, send him to be crucified. Even found a plaque here with his name on it. So the Romans used the beautiful city too.

➤ **Paul: citizen of Rome; citizen of heaven**

In 57 AD, the apostle Paul was in Jerusalem; at the house of the lord, the temple. He was accused by some Jews of bringing a gentile into the court where only Jews were allowed- he hadn't- but they thought he did, and a riot started. Roman soldiers who were watching came and pulled him out of the crowd and were preparing to flog him. They thought he was a Jew, as they prepared to flog him Paul said: "You do this to a roman citizen"

ACTS 22.

Afraid, they stopped. The penalty for abusing a Roman citizen without a trial is severe, maybe even crucifixion. And they sent him under armed guard to Caesarea. And Luke says, the governor Felix kept him in Herod's palace for 2 years **ACTS 24.**

So Paul spent two years here. He would be tried three times. Some scholars even think it may have been in this audience hall. Interesting thought to stand here where Paul may have stood. First by Felix, then by his replacement Festus, then by Festus and Herod of the time: Herod Agrippa. It's at that second trial when Paul was being accused of offenses against the temple that Paul said "I'm in a roman court, I appeal to Caesar" **ACTS 25.**

And he used his Roman citizenship and his Roman right to ask for an audience with Caesar himself. Maybe that's what he wanted, to talk to the emperor, about messiah King Jesus. What makes that curious is that seven years earlier, around 50 AD, Paul is in a city even more Roman than this one. Philippi in Greece. He's arrested there for what he was teaching. He's flogged and put in the stocks; in prison. And he never says a word about his Roman citizenship. **ACTS 16.**

Why here claim Roman citizenship, but in an even more Roman city than this, choose not to. Let's rejoin our study group. Come with me to the forum in Philippi. We'll be right next to the imperial temple not far from the bema, the platform, where the judges would have sat for a trial in that city. And let's ask the question: why doesn't Paul claim Roman citizenship in Philippi? Come, let's go see.

➤ **Philippi: Roman in every way**
• **Where the gospel of Caesar rules**

If we want to talk about the confrontation between the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom that Paul came to proclaim. And the kingdom of this world in Paul's day: Rome. No better place than in a Roman forum. Agora the Greeks called it. The place of exchange of goods and ideas. Sort of the internet of their day. It was the social, political, and economic heart of an ancient Roman city. You can see it's laid out in Roman style, rectangularly. Via Ignatia actually passes right through as decumanus. So we're sitting at the east end of the Roman forum. There is an inscription that indicates that somewhere in this forum was an imperial altar, where the veneration, the worship, of the divine emperor happened.

Over there is bema, which is the official platform where the judge or the ruler or the official spokesperson would stand to make those official announcements. And on this hand, the imperial temple of the emperor, powerful and Roman. Those huge fluted columns, as if to stand here and say: this is the lord of the forum. The savior of the world, the one who has brought this peace, this- in Hebrew you would say- Shalom.

Over here you can see the word Octavia, the family name of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Octavian, of course, is Caesar Augustus, and this is his sister. And this city is devoted to her apparently. So we have no doubt there's an imperial presence here, which is a great way to discuss what happened when Paul comes with a new Kingdom. And not only to bring a message about a new new King, but to be the message.

He shows up with that message and instantly two individuals are impacted. One is named Lydia, and she bows the knee. And she becomes the message. Opens her home for others to see. ACTS 16.

The other is the slave girl, who is possessed by a demonic spirit, a pythia. And Paul acts on God's behalf with the power of the spirit, in the name of Jesus, the demon is driven out, and she is at least set free from that bondage. So the message is having an impact.

Now we're seated here in front of an imperial temple. The imperial message is also here. This says Caesar is lord and god. And he has a system, a message, which not only comes in words, but his citizens also live out that message. And when the two messages: the message that Paul brings, the gospel that Jesus is King. Meets the message that Caesar is lord, we can expect some kind of conflict. Because they both claim to be the message. Let me turn to Luke's account and listen to the story.

Acts 16:19-22

Now the assumption would be that the Judges would stand on the bema, that raised platform which is pretty well broken down over here. But imagine a dramatic looking place, and the judges are there, and Paul and Silas are assembled in front of them.

“And the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully”

APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

- ✓ What are the contrasts Ray Vander Laan identifies and why are they important?
- ✓ How does Paul's experiences so far in Philippi set the stage for what happens next?

➤ **Punishment Roman Style**

Now a couple of thoughts. This is a colony. This is Imperial Rome. Paul's a Roman citizen. You can't do that to a Roman. Even a Jewish Roman. The penalties are severe for that kind of mistreatment of a Roman. Which means they didn't know Paul was a Roman. He could have put a stop to this at any moment by saying "just a minute look in my bag, I've got my diptych, I've got the evidence of my citizenship right here. Leave me alone". And they would have at least had to have a legal trial. For some reason Paul prefers to remain a Jew, a citizen of Heaven, for some reason.

Now in the Roman practice, the magistrate would have two assistants called lictors, and the lictors carried a bundle of rods. About this high, broomstick size. And they carried- that was a symbol of their authority. And when there was an incident, and somebody was judged by the magistrate to be guilty, they were beaten on the spot. Right now, right here. And so apparently the magistrate said "lictors grab them, strip them down so their back is exposed, and lash them." And they were severely flogged, in spite of Paul at least, being a Roman. And then sent to jail.

➤ **The Philippian jail**

• **The price of being the message**

Now typically prison is not a sentence in the Roman world. Prison is a holding place, until a holding place until another sentence can be carried out, whether slavery or crucifixion or whatever your sentence is. So apparently they're being held in prison just in case.

Acts 16:23-24

Now we all know what stocks are, I think, but the Romans used stocks as torture as well. And it is very possible, if not probable, that what they did was to put Paul and Silas's feet in the stocks and then to stretch them apart just to the point of the legs being pulled out of joint. So they're probably in a pretty painful, awful position in the inner part of that prison.

When you become Jesus' message, and begin to critique the other kingdoms of this world, don't expect them to treat you nicely. I would suggest if you truly are the message, you may attract the poor, the weak, the marginalized, the Rahabs, the Ruths, and those folks who left Egypt with the Israelites. But don't expect those to whom the system brings benefits to necessarily be all that happy.

Now I hope and pray none of us end up in those kind of stocks, but I do think being the message comes with a price. Because Jesus paid a very high price for being the message. And you know what, I think Paul and Silas were willing to do it anyway.

Acts 16:25

• **Prayer and praise at midnight**

They're even being the message in jail. It may be a very painful position. Now a thought or two. First of all in Hebrew, to pray isn't "our father who art in heaven" only. You say I go to church to worship, a Jew says I go to synagogue to pray. They may have receding bible passages, they may have been actually praying. They were obviously singing hymns, because it says that. They're holding a worship service.

The other prisoners get to experience the message, not only hear the message. They even choose to be the message while they're suffering. I'd like to remind you of something: Paul's a Jew. So about midnight, they began worshipping. Now I pictured Paul sitting there, beaten to a pulp, bruises and blood. He's been flogged severely by the rod of the lictors. And saying "ah man Silas, I can't sleep. Let's sing something, you got a number?" And they break into *How Great Thou Art* or some such praising God hymn. But I'd like to suggest it might be a little different from that.

Psalms 119:61-64 (ESV) ⁶¹Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law. ⁶²At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules. ⁶³I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts. ⁶⁴The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!

I think Paul said "man this lousy", but the text says, "at midnight, so Silas if I happen to fall asleep you wake me up, because I want to be a man of the book. I will not sell out the mission under any cost whatsoever."

I'm not so sure that "about midnight" is just a trivial detail. It seems to me it's probably far away enough from actual midnight that the way Luke gets us there is to say "about midnight." And so here are Paul and Silas, not pleading with God to set them free, simply. But actually worshipping God for the privilege of being the message. I wonder how many prisoners ended up in Lydia's household community of faith. Because they experienced- they knew God personally in Paul.

APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

- ✓ How do we identify open and closed doors? Obvious vs. subtle or cloaked; hard vs. easy, etc.
- ✓ Paul got sent to prison for being the message, in what ways do we “pay the price” for following Jesus, does it always look the same as what Paul experienced?
- ✓ Are there ways we “sell out” and justify it?
- ✓ What motivates some people to keep going and strive to overcome when facing obstacles when others become hopelessly discouraged or frustrated?

➤ **Suddenly God shows up**

Suddenly, oh I love when that word shows up, that generally means God shows up! I don't think Paul expected it, and I guarantee that none of the other prisoners expected it. But God showed up!

Acts 16:26

Earthquakes generally announce a dramatic entrance of God in an unusual way. The earthquake at Sinai, the earthquake at the moment of Jesus' death, and the moment of Jesus' resurrection, and while the disciples were praying in Jerusalem. And God says “I'm in this too!” And the effect: he set the prisoners free. But they don't all run, those prisoners.

Acts 16:27-28

Some suggest the reason he wanted to kill himself was he could be tortured and crucified for prisoners escaping. That's possible. I think there's another reason, I think the man is more honorable than that, he's probably a roman soldier. In the Roman practice if you die honorably after committing an offense like that, suicidally, your family retains your property. That's why Cassius and Brutus commit suicide over here when they fight Octavian, because when you die honorably, even when you die, in a sense, as an enemy, your family is protected. And I wonder if that jailer was a noble enough man to say “my last act will be to protect my family.” I don't know, but I think that's possible, if not probable.

But the prisoners didn't run. Why? Now maybe you can say “well God held them there” or “Paul held them there.” But there are other situations where Paul flees! Over a city wall one time. Why does he stay? I think he wants to be the message, and it makes me wonder if some of those other prisoners had bought in and decided for the sake of the jailer's life, to stay.

➤ **The Philippian jailer: “What must I do to be saved?”**

Wouldn't that be the effect of being the message? Wouldn't that be just like Jesus to hang around and even face possible suffering to protect someone else? He is blown away.

Acts 16:29

Now we assume being saved there means “born again so I go to heaven.” Then he knew a lot more theology than I expect a typical roman jailer knew. He has to learn that. I think he says “what must I do so they don't kill me?” Because if one of those prisoners said I'm gonna make a run for it, and he's gone, the jailer is a dead man. His life was in their hands.

“What do you want from me?” Being a roman I think he thought, “is it money? I'll give you all I got. You want my house? I'll be your slave. What must I do?” And Paul said “it's much easier than that, its grace.” He recognizes in Paul and in Silas, a very different Kingdom than he's used to.

He doesn't throw himself at the feet of the priest at the Imperial Temple. He doesn't run to the Imperial Altar and fall down before the priest of Caesar himself and say “save me!” Because he knows he'll die. Because this kingdom is very much directed toward those in power. And very much against those who are weak.

He falls at the feet of another God, and another knee bows. So this time with some pretty dramatic intervention from God. But notice, all he has seen is the witness of Paul and Silas. The witness of their actions. “Save me!” He pleads. Now watch, they replied.

Acts 16:31-32

Now they're explaining, I think, that saved is a bigger word than this jailer could imagine. I think Paul said "yes, we'll save you from the authorities, we're all here don't worry. We haven't run, your life is ok. But there's a bigger saved sir. Let me tell you the word of the Lord. Let me tell you about Moses, let me tell you about David, let me tell you about Jesus, let me tell you about the resurrection and the ascension, and the forgiveness of sins."

Being saved isn't just "my life is preserved", but I have joined another community, a new gospel, a new Kingdom. One where innocent prisoners risk their lives for jailers who mistreated them. Would you have been the message? Would you have stayed in that prison if you knew you might go back in the stocks the next day, or worse? Would you have protected that jailer who stretched your legs to the point they were coming out of joint, though you knew you were innocent? Would you have been the message!?

They experienced the greatness of the knowledge of Jesus the Messiah. That jailer and his family. And that led to an even greater salvation. And you know what? They didn't simply go home with a new religious system. You want to hear what happened? They instantly became the message.

APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

- ✓ How can we be always *ready* for the sudden earthquake but not *expect* it, and not be discouraged when it doesn't come?
- ✓ Do we make assumptions about what people say, like how we assume the jailer is talking about *being saved*, and when we misunderstand people, do we give them grace?
- ✓ Are we always willing to risk our lives for the "pagan jailer"? What does that look like?
- ✓ The kingdom of Caesar is "directed towards the strong". In what ways does the Kingdom of God turn that right-side up?
- ✓ What's the difference between believing in a new religious system vs being the message?

Acts 16:33-34

He risked his life. Apparently he takes the prisoners out of prison, at least Paul and Silas. He takes them home, which would violate everything in the imperial code, take that Mr. Caesar. And he cares for them, which would directly violate the very purpose of putting them under that torture in the first place. He doesn't know they're roman citizens, not yet. And he risks the life of his whole family, for their sake. And if I'd been one of the other prisoners in that outfit, you count me in too. Because I've never seen that in any imperial religion.

Acts 16:35-36

Some have said that maybe it was the earthquake that scared the magistrates. The Romans were superstitious, and a sudden earthquake would be thought of as an act of god. And maybe that moved them, or maybe they just decided we punished them enough let's send them, I don't know. Now, Paul claims Roman citizenship.

Acts 16:37-40

Paul holds every card in the deck. If he reports this, the whole town will face a penalty, and the magistrates could face execution. Now what's that? Again I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I'd like to suggest something. I don't think Paul came here to this colony of Imperial Rome, wanting to have his message heard because he was a Roman. That's not what validates his message, you know what validates his message? The word of God and the Kingdom of Priests put into practice.

This is the Message, or the Jesus part that hasn't been written yet in Paul's day. And the proof it is the real deal? We'll sit in jail and risk our lives for the sake of a pagan jailer. I don't want you to listen to me because I'm a Roman, oh I'll use my Roman citizenship, and I think he uses it at the end to protect the new believers. Implying you touch one of those new believers and I'll report this to the nearest roman magistrate what you did to me. And that church has an insurance policy. But the validity of the message is the message practiced.

The way you live validates the message. And Christians in my opinion have lost the moral right to speak to an increasingly broken world. Because far too often we are not the message we speak. But I think the Bible promises us: if you will validate his message, by being the message, if you will attempt to criticize what's broken in our world. Or rather what's causing brokenness in our world, they'll put you in jail. Literally or metaphorically. Because you threaten another message.

Want to be part of something really big? Want to be part of, by the grace of god and the power of spirit, being used to bring someone to bend the knee and call Him King? Then this is what it looks like.

Ephesians 6:19

APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

- ✓ In what ways does pride get in the way of letting the Holy Spirit use us when it's painful?
- ✓ The jailer has his life totally transformed, simply because the prisoners were willing to calmly sit in jail rather than escaping. Sometimes spiritual warfare is as simple as waiting on The Lord and doing the ordinary things.
- ✓ Do we expect the Holy Spirit to allow us to be heroic always? If not, how can we stay in step in the Spirit when he guides us in ways that don't seem to accomplish heroic acts?



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