



## A Clash of Kingdoms Session 3 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 109-110.

50 A.D. Christians in Philippi living as citizens of Heaven, a vibrant community that extended God's Kingdom one person, one household at a time.

However another kingdom existed with Philippi being an extension of Rome and the powers of the demonic kingdom behind it.

Like Jesus, Paul understood he was involved in a clash of kingdoms, understanding that it was not people or human entities trying to stop him. It was satan who will always be fighting God and is behind human evil.

The first sign of struggle in Philippi comes in the form of a small girl who is a slave to the power of the evil one and her owners. Although the power of evil is strong, the Kingdom of God is greater and prevails.

This story is a powerful plea for each person who has been restored to God's family is responsible to represent God's Kingdom on earth by reaching out to offer hope and help to those who live in chaos. It's a reminder that the evil one is powerless when confronted by the power of the Lord Jesus. It also helps us to recognize that the enemy of God's Kingdom is not those who disagree with us or believe differently or oppose us. The enemy is the very one Jesus and Paul overcame and, who by the name of Jesus, we have the power to overcome as well.

**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 3, "The Powers of Darkness"

#### ➔ The Kingdom of God confronts the powers of darkness

**Matthew 4:17 (ESV)** From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matt 4 – Jesus came to live in Capernaum with unique message – Kingdom of Heaven is near – but there was another king who hates the shalom God desires and loves chaos and brokenness. Many are under his control. Jesus had amazing compassion for those under the control of the evil one. Where we might have shunned them Jesus seemed to seek them out. Then many years later Paul met a young girl under the control of the evil one. Let's see if Paul had that same compassion and if the evil one is still bound so that the girl can be set free.

## ➔ A young slave girl

Forum at Philippi. Paul arrived about 50 AD proceeded to engage this Roman colony.  
The 2<sup>nd</sup> of the stories of Paul in Philippi

### Acts 16:16-18a

Paul is meeting a power that is beyond and behind the Roman imperial power. Jesus on several occasions was confronted by people, sometimes in the synagogue, possessed by the powers of darkness. He would demand that those spirits leave and they would. Jesus explained it like this:

**Mark 3:27 (ESV)** But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

Ray Vander Laan loves that description. It suggests in Jesus mind that strong man... that evil one has power – he's a strongman – don't underestimate him. At same time, those he possesses in whatever form belong to God, so Jesus is going to **carry off his possessions**. But to do so you have to bind the strong man. Otherwise you can't.

### APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

✓ Why is it important to view the Christian life as being in the context of spiritual warfare?

**Matthew 11:11–15 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup>Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, <sup>14</sup>and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

✓ What does it look like when we are “on mission” following Jesus' example and orders?

**Luke 19:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

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So we're meeting the strong man here. He's in Philippi, too. In this case the one under the power of the strong man is a slave girl: “a young girl... a child.”

1. The girl “strong man” was a young child – 5 to 10 years old – who has some kind of a spirit possession being used by slave masters to earn money for them.

## ➔ Slavery in the Roman Empire

2. The girl “strong man” was a slave – one in three people in Roman empire was a slave.

### Acts 16:

Up to one third of the population of around 70 million people are slaves in the Roman Empire – over 20 million slaves. Became a slave... as a prisoner of war, born a slave, sold by parents, a debt couldn't pay.

One of more common: infant exposure – common for infants brought to a certain location and left to die. It was considered socially accepted to do that.

A ritual called (sublatus): a mother who had given birth would bring the child to the father. If he turned away and rejected the child, the child was brought outside the city to die. If he took the child, he was saying, “let's keep this child and raise this one.” Some scholars estimate that there was a significant number of children rejected every day

Many of these rejected children would be picked up in that place by people and become a slave in that household.

## ➔ A python spirit

3. The girl “strong man” was possessed by a spirit by which she predicted the future... Ray Vander Laan notes that he doesn't disagree with that translation, but it is an interpretation. The word is...

“pythia.” She had a “pythia” spirit. Let's find out what it meant that she had the spirit of pythia.

## APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

- ✓ What are the characteristics of the “strong man?” How is that different than the usual picture of the spiritual “enemy?”
- ✓ What lessons can we draw from “the strongman” being a young girl?

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### ➔ The oracle at Delphi

100 miles west of Athens, lower part of Greece at the foot of Mt. Parnassus

People of Paul’s day did not have written texts – neither the Greek nor Roman religions – so their gods were distant and they craved a word from their gods. Ordinary people consulted all kinds of omens: clouds, animal livers, flocks of birds, cast lots – to try to get info from the gods for ordinary things. But for the really important the rich and powerful, came to Oracle of Delphi –

“delphi” means womb = worship of mother earth, Gaia (get our word geology).

### ➔ Hungry for a word from the gods

Back in ancient times people came to such places to get a word from their gods.

Bible is clear: don’t do that or He will turn His face away from us... **don’t have anything to do with such practices.**

But these people, ignorant of God, would come to Delphi to get a word from the god Apollo. Let’s see what is involved in getting a word from the god Apollo.

### ➔ Rock of Gaia and Pythia

Come up several hundred feet, close to Temple of Apollo where revelation was supposed to be given.

Started at Athena where would offer prayer – she is the protector of this place. Went past gymnasium where athletes would train. Came to the Propylaia, the gate, to enter sacred enclosure. Then climbed the sacred way lined by Temple structures (treasuries) to hold the trophies left behind to thank Apollo for his revelation. The most famous of the treasuries is the Athenian, a beautiful, small structure filled with things showing off the glory of Athens, including trophies from battle of Marathon between Greeks and Persians.

Large boulder, Rock of Gaia, where there was a shrine involving mother earth. Two faultlines run beneath temple structure from which emitted ethylene with hallucinating properties and people would come here to get revelations from gods.

Greek myth: the place where revelation came was guarded by a large python, which attempted to rape Leto, Apollo’s mother while pregnant with him – the rape didn’t happen, Apollo was born, as adult returned to kill python with bow and arrow, the python sank into the earth and the fumes that emerged were thought to be fumes from the rotting carcass and breathing them in was thought to put within you the spirit of Apollo and allowed you to access the info about the future that was kept in the underworld. At that point it becomes the shrine of Apollo instead of Gaia. The priestess who will ingest the fumes was named after the source of the fumes, “Pythia.” – connection to the word python.

The people would come to the Temple of Apollo, where Apollo gave revelation. People would be placed in order: the rich, powerful and famous at the front and lesser social standing. Only happened on 7<sup>th</sup> of each month except during winter months, thus not a lot of opportunity.

## APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

- ✓ In what ways do people seek supernatural counsel and power?
- ✓ To ponder: how much effort do we put into seeking that from Christ?

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### ➔ Receiving an oracle from Apollo

The Temple of Apollo – statue outside, went in, down flight of stairs, to chamber where the priestess of pythia would meet with people. Originally it was a young girl.

This is the only Greek Temple where ordinary people could get this close to the presence of god represented. People would present petition. Priestess would respond in a raspy strange voice coming out of the trance. Might not understand what she meant and might have multiple possible interpretations.

People came from great distances just to get a word from god

### ➔ The last oracle

In 380 the emperor, a Christian, closed the Temple. About 10 years later the last oracle was given.

“Tell the king, the fair wrought house has fallen. No shelter has Apollo. The fountains are now silent. The voice is still. It is finished.”

**John 19:28–30 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup>After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” <sup>29</sup>A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. <sup>30</sup>When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

So while there is evil power here, there is a greater power that once said, “It is finished.”

**And in His “it is finished,” bound the strong man.**

Let’s go back to the slave girl, she has a pythia. At some point she was brought to an Apollo place – invited Apollo to possess her. She would devote or be devoted to Apollo, and it was believed that the pythia spirit would fill her with capacity to make prophetic statements.

It could be considered a hoax, but the Bible is clear that when you come before an idol there’s more than a piece of stone. Hebrew Bible says you offered sacrificed to demons.

**Deuteronomy 32:15–18 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup>“But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. <sup>16</sup>They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. <sup>17</sup>They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. <sup>18</sup>You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Paul will say to the Corinthians, not far from here, that sacrifices offered to idols are offered to demons.

**1 Corinthians 10:20–21 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup>No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup>You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

There are dark forces here. That strong man that Jesus bound on occasion is active here. And think of a little girl brought here by people who understood what they were doing but she did not – and devoting the child to a pagan god and the powers of darkness. Then she spends her life as a slave to Apollo and the demonic powers behind him.

### APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

✓ What do we takeaway from the contrast between Jesus as the true God and idols as demons?

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### ➔ Slaves set free through “sacred manumission”

Before go back to Paul’s response, look at something ...

About 300 feet of wall with inscriptions of names of people who were set free, manumitted here.

Temples in Biblical world had a system by which slaves could be set free from their masters:

a slave would raise enough money to cover the price to purchase himself

bring money to temple and present it to Apollo through the priest

come to temple with owner and the priest would pay the money to owner and you would be free

**BUT you belonged to the god.**

RAY VANDER LAAN: the slave girl was really a slave twice – to the owners and to the pythia, the evil force within. So what will Paul do? Preach a dramatic public sermon against Apollo and the demon behind? No, Paul will surprise you. Let's go back to Philippi to find out how the story ends.

➔ **Set free...**

**... From bondage at the temple of Apollo**

Imagine Paul on his way from Forum to place of prayer at the river and suddenly the girl shows up... **Acts 16:17–18 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup>She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup>And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

I like to think that Paul had “Jesus ears.” ***What do you hear in those around you?*** Can you listen past the annoying things that people whose lives are disrupted in some way can be? Can you hear the ways Jesus can hear. ***The strongman was bound here, too.***

**... By the power of Jesus' name**

**Matthew 12:28–30 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup>But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup>Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. <sup>30</sup>Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

***By the power of Jesus' Name, that kingdom could not prevail before the Kingdom of the Messiah.*** And she was set free from her demonic spirit.

By the power of Jesus' name, that evil kingdom could not prevail over the Kingdom of the Messiah. And she was set free of her demonic spirit.

**... Bought with a price to serve Jesus**

I want you to think about how what we learned at Delphi can illustrate who we are in Christ – the comparison of the Roman slave:

a slave would raise enough money to cover the price to purchase himself  
bring money to temple and present it to Apollo through the priest  
come to temple with owner and the priest would pay the money to owner and you would be free  
BUT person belonged to the god – free to go but for rest of life, he/she belonged to the god.

**... This is a picture of who we are in Jesus...**

Paul writes that we are slaves to sin and death in Romans

**Romans 6:16–18 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup>and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Paul writes in Galatians we are slaves to pagan gods... WERE slaves to pagan gods

**Galatians 4:6–8 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. <sup>8</sup>Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.

Jesus paid an enormous ransom, we could never have raised enough to be set free – ***Jesus did.***

**1 Corinthians 7:23 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup>You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.

In a sense we are free – set free from our bondages  
But in another sense we belong to the king (as a slave).

Paul begins his letter to the Philippi community – wouldn't it be cool if that little girl was in that community (to hear Paul's words) "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus."

I know that bothers some people because we want to be free in Christ... we are... but at the same time we are His slaves. And I'll take that slavery anytime.

So who is the other kingdom here? Is it Rome? in some ways.

But the other kingdom is really the kingdom of the evil one. And guess what? The strong man has been bound!

**Luke 11:20–23 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup>But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>21</sup>When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; <sup>22</sup>but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. <sup>23</sup>Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

So let's join the movement that carries away his possessions. ***There are a lot of little children out there – and I mean that in all kinds of ways – who are in bondage***

But there's another story in Philippi because the owners who are good Romans aren't happy that the girl has been set free. It's going to cost them money. And that, in a Hellenistic world, is important.

#### **APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:**

- ✓ Do we give thought to and value freedom in Christ?
- ✓ Are there ways we confuse freedom in Christ with earthly freedom?
- ✓ Where are we in danger of becoming enslaved when we think we are living free?
- ✓ Who are the "slaves" in our lives that Jesus wants to use us to set free?

**CLOSING:** Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 aloud together...

**1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup>for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

#### **TAKEAWAYS...**



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