

Sermon: Welcome to Europe

Text: Acts 16:11-40

Introduction:

One of the things we talk about fairly often here at King Street is the Upper Story and the Lower Story. The Upper Story is the big picture story that God is telling (that we read about in the Bible)—extending all the way back before the creation of this world, and looking ahead to a glorious eternity in a new heaven and earth for those who are the children of God. The Lower Story refers to the individual lives that each of us are living. The Bible makes it very clear that we are basically trapped in space and time, and unable to “see” so many of the spiritual realities that exist all around us. It’s like taking off in an airplane from an airport in the midst of a terrible thunder storm. The winds howl all around us, and lighting flashes with terrible rage. And yet...as the airplane continues to climb in altitude...the moment comes when you break through the cloud cover and experience a completely different reality “above” the storm. The sun is shining brightly, and it’s hard to believe that only moments before you were fearing for your life in the midst of terrible darkness and danger.

Every page of the Bible is saturated with this tension between the Upper Story and the Lower Story. Especially when we’re reading the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). Everywhere that Jesus goes—He is constantly surrounded by the “storm” of dark spiritual forces that are seeking to destroy Him. Over and over again Jesus comes face to face with demons and evil spirits. There is no letup from the opposition of evil (demon-controlled) people who are seeking to kill Jesus at every turn.

And yet, all the while, Jesus remains completely calm and in control. Why? It’s because He is FULLY AWARE of the Upper Story. He knows exactly what is going on. He knows that by leaving His heavenly home, He was entering “enemy controlled territory”—where the forces of Satan would stop at nothing to oppose and kill Him. And He knows that by sacrificing His own life on the cross—He would completely destroy the power that Satan holds over each and every one of us. It reminds me of a song lyric from a number of years ago by singer Michael W. Smith: *“Nobody knew His secret ambition. Nobody knew His claim to fame. He broke the old rules steeped in tradition, He tore the holy veil away. Questioning those in powerful position, running to those who called His name. But nobody knew His secret ambition was to give His life away.”*

This morning, we are examining a pivotal moment in the history of Christianity. Paul and his companions (Silas, Timothy and Luke) are sailing from the port city of Troas—and crossing the North Aegean Sea to the continent of Europe. This is a BIG DEAL. Looking back over the scope of history, the establishment of Christianity in Europe is eventually what has led to the spread of the Gospel to the entire world. And although Satan is unable to see the future—I’m certain he was fully aware that he needed to come strong in the face of Paul and his team. Which is precisely what happens...as we’ll see in our study.

- Take some time to discuss how you see Satan at work in the world today. How is the Devil trying to thwart the work of God in the world? How is he trying to oppose individual believers? What are his primary tools? What is his ultimate goal? Is he succeeding?

Examination:

- Read **Acts 16:11-15**

- Go back and read Acts 16:9-10. Why did Paul and his team decide to leave Troas (v. 11), and sail to Philippi? What was their purpose in going to Philippi? (v. 10) As their situation would eventually become very difficult—what do you think it meant to Paul and his team to KNOW that God had, quite literally, CALLED them to go to Philippi?
- Why do you think Luke highlights the fact that Philippi was a Roman colony?
- Keeping in mind that this is Paul's very first missionary stop in an entirely new setting (Europe), we need to keep a close eye on HOW Paul will go about making inroads to preach the Gospel. What do we learn about Paul's strategy from verse 13?
- Discuss everything we learn about Lydia from verses 14 & 15.
- In the Gospel of Luke, one of the clear points of emphasis for Luke was the vital role of women in the ministry of Jesus. Here again in Acts 16, we learn that a prominent and successful business woman was the very first convert to Christ in Europe. It's impossible to overstate how counter to culture this clarity and emphasis was. Discuss what this can and should mean to us today.

- Read **Acts 16:16-40**

- It didn't take long at all for the spiritual battle (Satan's opposition) to heat up. Discuss verses 16-18 in light of Upper Story spiritual warfare.
- Why do you think money lies at the root of many (most!) conflicts? (v. 19)
- What "unlawful customs" were Paul and Silas advocating? (v. 21)
- It's easy to read verses 22-23 quickly and without much thought. Take a few moments to let the events of these two verses sink in. How horrifying would it be to be stripped, beaten with rods, severely flogged and then thrown into prison—and all because of the fury of a mob, without any due process?
- How did Paul and Silas respond to all of this pain and injustice? (v. 25)
- It's abundantly clear that God is the force behind this earthquake. Do you ever wonder why God didn't send the earthquake BEFORE Paul and Silas were severely abused? Why do you suppose God allowed them to go through this kind of suffering before He stepped in to act? Is this true for us as well?
- The question the jailer asks in verse 30 stands as one of the greatest questions any person could ever ask. Keep in mind, though, that he wasn't asking a theological question (he had no idea what it meant to be justified by faith—or even who Paul was). The jailer is fearing for his life—and the lives of his wife and kids. He's in essence asking: "What can I do to get out of this mess?" What is Paul's answer to him in verses 31-32? How does this answer his question?
- How does Paul and Silas' Roman citizenship come into play in verses 37-39?

Application:

Commit yourself in a fresh way this coming week to sharing the Gospel through your life, your words and your actions. How will you respond when Satan opposes you at every turn?