

When I was a young fella, our church did a bible-study, which was a bit of an introduction to Christianity. I can't remember which one it was, but it included a fair bit of reading from the Gospels (After all, that's where we learn about what Jesus said, taught and did...) And then we'd come back together the next week, we'd talk about what we'd read, and ask questions about it.

And I remember one particular night, a high school science teacher and his wife were there (they'd been part of our church for quite a while), and he said "What's the go with all these demons? It seems like there was an epidemic of demons back then – what's that all about?" ..., Of course, in the gospels, the demons are always recognising Jesus, and Jesus and his disciples are casting out demons from people and setting them free....

And so the others at the bible-study explained to him that Demons are angels who have rebelled against God – that Satan is the chief demon and the other demons are his underlings, but I sensed that he and his wife, were certainly not accepting what was being said...

*And over the next few weeks and months, they became less and less regular at church, and eventually (my recollection is) they dropped off **almost** completely.... And I reckon, it may have all stemmed back to that night.*

*It seemed like, the whole spiritual reality of good vs. evil; light vs. darkness; Satan against God; angels and demons.... It seemed like they'd never considered this – that their scientific way of thinking had dismissed it all, as a load of nonsense, and the suggestion that the spiritual battle, is a very **real***

*battle – that the spiritual realm **does** actually exist, was something that they didn't want to have any part in.*

And there are many people in churches today, who **will** believe in a personal god, but they **won't** believe in a personal devil. And Satan's biggest trick – his most effective strategy, is to get people to believe that he doesn't exist... Now I'm going to be really blunt (have you noticed I'm good at being blunt?) I'm not going to beat around the bush: You cannot be a bible-believing Christian, and not believe in the existence of personal evil beings (demons).

Jesus believed in demons – do you think Jesus was deluded? Of course not.

And if Jesus believed they existed, then we should too. In December and January, we were working our way through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and we did a bit of a sub-series on the spiritual battle and spiritual armour, and Ephesians 6 says: ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And if you want to have a bit of a refresher Those messages are still at www.bushdisciples.church.

And in today's reading, Paul and Silas enter into this spiritual battle in a very real way. The bible reading said: ¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a

slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

Alright, now in the original Greek, it literally says: that she had a “spirit of python” – “a snake spirit”. And what that’s alluding to, is their pagan belief in Greek mythology, that she was inspired by a snake spirit like a previous Oracle from Delphi¹ ...

What did this so-called snake-god enable her to do? Well, it enabled her to make a great deal of money for **her** lords – her owners – her slave masters. And she did it by prophesying the future – what today, we would call fortune telling.

So, she was **said** to be inspired by this “snake-god” . But Paul knew better ... – There is only **one** true God – YHWH – the Holy Trinity – Father, son and holy spirit. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains to them that when the pagans sacrifice to their gods, they’re not sacrificing to gods at all – they’re sacrificing to demons. And he could see that this girl was not being inspired by a god – she was communicating with a demon... And, that’s scary stuff...

But it was big business. And we’re actually going to find this, as we continue on in Acts – when people start turning to Christ, the children of the devil lose business. So in Acts, there were plenty of people spending big bucks on idols and fortune tellers and sacrifices & what-not... And maybe some of you might be feeling “Well thank goodness we don’t have those sort of problems around today...” But you know what??? We do!!!

We are living in an age of renewed interest in the occult (the word “occult” is used to describe spiritual, mystical, supernatural, or magical powers, practices, or phenomena)

And in our day – today – we are seeing a renewed interest and fixation on the occult.

- The growth of the ‘New age’ movement
- It only costs you \$20 to get in the gate of the Mind Body Spirit festival at Sydney where they have over 200 exhibitors and more than 40 “talented psychic readers”
- Or you can go to the Australian psychic expo which runs for 11 days in Toowoomba and 5 days in Warwick
- Or you can get somebody to do some Water divining for you before you drill your next bore.
- Organic farmers are being **profoundly** influenced by what’s being called “biodynamic” holistic farming principals, which are basically occultic practices for growing crops. – Transmitting good vibes to your crop via a cosmic pipe, or producing a secret cow-horn fertiliser by burying a cow horn (stuffed with manure) on a full moon and then digging it up a few months later... In fact, at one time, I was looking for non-alcoholic still wine to use for communion, and it was actually quite difficult to find one that had **not** been produced by biodynamic farmers – which actually is an occultic practice.

- I did a quick search on the App Store. I typed in the word “astrology” and it gave me 1228 apps to choose from, varying from Astrology; horoscope; Tarot Card apps– there’s an enormous market out there.
- Then we have the growth of mystical Eastern alternative therapies
- Reiki; faith healing; iridology..
- And then there’s Crystals; amber;

You know, as we become a people who are more and more fixated on ourselves, more and more people are turning to this sort of stuff, and it’s big business...

And even today, when revival comes to a community, if people are being taught what it means to repent – to turn from the practice of sin, and to turn to following Christ, these industries suffer, along the drug industry; the grog industry; the sex trade, all suffer...

And my advice is “don’t get involved in anything to do with the occult.” Be aware of it. Be discerning. Ask yourself the question “If this is supposed to work, how **does** it work? Who’s behind it?” And you’ll soon find, that if it works, it’s demons that are making it work... And you don’t want to be involved with demons.... Just as there are miracles of God, there are false miracles of Satan.

Anyway, this slave girl with the demon, followed after them for days, constantly crying out “¹⁷.... “These men are

servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” (which is actually true) They were the servants of the Most High God. They were proclaiming the way to salvation... But after a few days of her constantly disruptive behaviour, Paul was really annoyed, and he turned to her and he said to the spirit, **“I command you in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her.”**.. And it came out of her that very hour.

You see, as a Christian, you don't need to be afraid of demons. The Name of Jesus Christ – that name which we love – that name which we cherish – that name which we worship – that name which we carry, is the name by which demons flee... And if ever you feel you've encountered a demon, you use the name of Jesus Christ as your defence.

But why did he cast this demon out? It was actually telling the truth – surely it would've been a promotion for their cause... Well I think there's 3 reasons:

- Firstly, it was the source of the knowledge. God can testify for Himself – He doesn't need Satan to do it.
- Secondly, it was the way it was done – calling out, disrupting what they were trying to do and say.
- And Thirdly, whilst it was the truth, it wasn't the whole truth...

The people at Philippi, had a multitude of gods. And now this evil spirit was calling out about this “Most High God” – just another one to add to the list...

One time I got to share the good news with an Indian lass (a Hindu). And I'd actually been forewarned – Hindus are often

quite willing to believe in Jesus, because Jesus then becomes another god, to set up alongside all their others – they worship a multitude of Gods... And the thing was, I had to give the whole message – to be born again – to become a Christian, you have to renounce all other gods. You have to turn from those gods, and to Christ and to Christ alone.

The demon wasn't giving them the full message – it was true, but it was an incomplete truth. And a half-truth or an incomplete truth, is more dangerous than a lie. Why? Because a lie is very easy to recognise, where as a half-truth slips under the radar... It sounds all very reasonable, and many people will be deceived by it, but a few people with a gift of discernment, will get the feeling, "It sounds reasonable, but there's something not quite right with it – there's something missing." It's an incomplete truth.

Anyway, once this demon's been cast out, the girl couldn't prophesy any more... Her owners weren't concerned about her welfare – they were concerned about their profit margins. Their means of making money had suddenly dried up.

So they seized Paul and Silas, and dragged them to the marketplace, and to the magistrates, and they said "These men are Jews, and they're disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us Romans to practice."

Christianity was very un-Roman. Why? Because it was intolerant. And it's the same for us in Australia. Christianity, is very "un-Australian". "Tolerance" is held up as the virtue

that trumps all others. Live and let live. You can believe what you want to believe, but never can your belief impact on me. “Tolerance”. And yet you know, Biblically, “tolerance” is never put forward as a virtue...

Christianity can be **very** un-Australian, but when you’re next faced with the choice, are you going to choose to be “Australian”? Or are you going to choose to be “Christian”?

Anyway, Paul and Silas are attacked by the crowd. They’re beaten with rods. They’re thrown into the jail, and the jailer is charged, “Don’t let’em get away..., and so he put them in the “inner prison” (alright, that’s locked doors **behind** locked doors), and he fastened their feet with stocks...

Why the big who-ha? “Don’t let’em get away...”, when they were just going to let them go the next day anyway??? It was a minor offence – it was never going to go to any higher court.

I’ll tell you what I think it was: The magistrates were flexing their muscles, showing these outsiders – these foreigners – these “Christians”, who’s got the power... But of course we know who **does** have the power, don’t we... God will not be mocked. Jesus is Lord.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.

²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must **I** do to be saved?"

Miracle after miracle after miracle.

1. Beaten, bound, in stocks, locked away in a cold, dark jail – the disciples of Jesus pray and sing hymns to God
2. Miracle No.2 – the other prisoners listened. Have you ever been in a prison? I have. Usually it's not the most savoury characters in a prison, and they'll tell you to shut up quick smart, if they don't like what you're doing.
3. Miracle No. 3 – One commentary I read says "The earthquake was powerful enough to loosen all the chains and bust open all the doors, but not powerful enough for the roof to cave in and kill everyone... And as I read that, I thought to myself "This bloke has no idea about engineering and construction and design"... I can tell ya, an ancient building will completely collapse long before an individual fixing will come out of an individual stone.
4. Miracle No. 4 – **All** the doors were opened. **Everyone's** bonds were unfastened... and nobody left...
5. Miracle No. 5 – Salvation.

The Jailer said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

And Paul's brief answer was "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." But there's a lot in that statement that needs to be unpacked. Like, what does it mean for Jesus to be "Lord"? What does it mean to believe in the **Lord** Jesus?

And so we're told, they then spoke the word of the Lord to him.

We probably don't pick it up in the English, but the word "Lord" is just right through this entire story...

- The owners of the slave girl, were "kurios" Lords of her.
- Paul and Silas were (our bibles say "servants") but in the original Greek, it says they were "dulos", which means slaves of the Most High God
- After the earthquake, the jailer addresses Paul and Silas as (our bibles translate it as "sirs"), but once again in the Greek, it says "Kurios", "Lords, what must I do to be saved?"
- And Paul and Silas direct him away from them – they're not lords – they're slaves – they're slaves to Christ – don't believe in us – believe in the real Lord. Believe in the Lord Jesus.
- To believe in Jesus just wasn't enough. And so they spoke the **word** of the "Lord" to them.

They repented – that's what we see – acts of repentance. They washed their wounds. They brought them into the house. Fed them... And he and his family were all baptised.

And get this, they believed in the Lord Jesus, but they rejoiced because they believed in God... Because the Lord Jesus, and God, are one....

And the story ends beautifully. Remember the magistrates were flexing their muscles by locking them up???? Well, in the end they're humiliated. The jail's all busted up. The prisoners are free, but they're still there. But they're not going to leave until the magistrates come, make an apology, and personally escort them out of the prison... God will not be mocked.

You know, in Acts Ch9, the Lord said "Paul is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Paul did suffer. Jesus is the Lord – He's the master. Paul is the obedient slave. And Paul and Silas did suffer. And in their suffering, Jesus was glorified as Lord. He was proclaimed as Lord. And Jesus is "saviour" to those to whom He is "Lord".

We're not actually told what became of that slave girl. She was set free from the demon that oppressed her. But we're not told, if she then bowed her knee to Jesus as Lord, and believed in the Lord Jesus. We don't know what became of her.

Acts focuses on the Jailer and his family. They did repent. They did turn to Jesus as Lord. And there was much rejoicing.

Do you believe in the **Lord** Jesus?

- I'm not asking if you just believe in Jesus – demons believe in Jesus.
- I'm not asking if you just believe that Jesus died for your sins – demons know that Jesus died for your sins.
- I'm not asking if you trust that Jesus has forgiven your sins

I'm asking, "Have you bowed to Jesus as Lord?" Have you fallen on your knees before the Lord Jesus? Have you given Him all that you are, for all that He is?

Questions.

ⁱ "It was believed that Apollo was embodied at Delphi in a snake, the Python" Witherington Ben III, The Acts of the Apostles – a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids. 1998. P.493-494