

# **Success for Christ**

## **Acts 16**

### **Lesson 26 in a Series about the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church**

A butcher had just one chicken and wanted to make it appear to the customer that he was picking out the best one from a coop full. He went back, slammed the coop, cackled like a chicken and came back with the one and only chicken that he had to sell to Mrs. Jones. He weighed it and said, "Mrs. Jones, that comes to \$1.98." Mrs. Jones said, "Well, if you don't mind I would like one just a little larger." So he returned to the back of the store, made more noises, and came back with the same chicken. He said, "That'll be \$2.25." Mrs. Jones replied, "I believe I will take both of them."

There are so many unethical practices in business today. The mindset seems to be that the ends justify the means. Christianity calls us to a different standard. Our continuing journey through Acts brings us to a reminder of the importance of success for Christ. The conversion of the first contact in the Roman colony of Philippi is Lydia, a seller of purple. Our next conversion is from a jailhouse. What can we learn from these accounts?

I believe it depends on where we look for success and how we have come to define it. So often, success is understood as prosperity in the job/career which brings about monetary gains in the things of this world. That's not what these two conversions are about.

Success needs to be understood in light of our commitment and mission to share Christ. Our success for Christ will have an influence in how we do business. Our success will be evident even in the midst of setbacks. Our success for Christ is guaranteed through our faithfulness.

Our lesson today comes from Acts 16:13-40. Let's break the passage into three parts. Our first look at success for Christ is...

## **In Business**

### **Acts 16:13-15**

**13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.**

Take note of several messages in this passage:

1. Jewish followers of God would meet at a place on the river bank. Stones would be placed in a circle near a tree so followers would know where to meet. Paul and his fellow ministers expected to find some people assembled there for prayer.
2. Lydia was a worshiper of God. That is what we would call a proselyte.
3. Lydia was a business woman. Purple dye came from shellfish. It was hard to get and expensive.
4. Lydia had experienced prosperity in her business. She invited the church to meet in her home.

May I suggest to you that Lydia was ethical in her business affairs. God sent Paul and his companions a long way and closed a few doors to bring them to this business woman. Lydia became the point of contact for the church in Philippi.

When we are true in our business affairs, honest in our dealings with others, the Lord can use us to accomplish great things. If any part of our being is counterfeit or questionable, can we have success for Christ?

## In Setbacks

The church has started in Philippi! The converts are excited! This is really going well in Philippi!

Not so fast, the slave girl with an evil spirit is set free by Paul. The owners have lost their fortune-telling business and want Paul to pay for it.

**22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.**

When circumstances change and it seems evil is taking over, remember who is in charge! ***“The One who is in you, is greater than the one who is in the world.”***<sup>1</sup>

Setbacks and obstacles are the pathway to share the message. It is not natural to look for opportunities when things are going wrong. The natural response is to take cover, pull back or even worse, change direction. We see Paul and Silas suffering a major setback...stripped...severely flogged...locked down. How can we find success for Christ in these circumstances? Would we even be looking for it?

## In Faithfulness

We find success for Christ in faithfulness to our commitment and mission.

**25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"**

**29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**

**31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.**

The faithfulness to the mission allowed the Lord to direct Paul and Silas to a man who needed to hear the message of Christ. The jailer's response was the believer's baptism.

We can see from the letters what faithfulness is all about. I believe continuing study and fellowship make the essence of faithfulness apparent in our lives. Do you know how the Lord would want you to conduct yourself in business, in relationships at home, in working for someone?

### **Colossians 3:18-24**

**18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.**

**19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.**

**20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.**

**21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.**

**22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**

## **Taking success for Christ home today...**

Setbacks will come...are they really setbacks or opportunities?

If you are hurt by someone...should you withdraw?

A schoolgirl writes about the cost of caring. "I've been thinking much this year about the importance of caring...I've often realized that it takes courage to care. Caring is dangerous. It leaves you open to hurt and to looking like a fool. And perhaps it's because they have been hurt so often that people are afraid to care...I have found many places in my own life where I keep a secret store of indifference as a sort of self-protection."<sup>2</sup>

Have you ever stumbled upon your own "*secret store of indifference as a sort of self-protection?*" Success for Christ does not seek protection for self; it seeks to care about others.

Are you faithful in all areas of your life? Our success for Christ depends on it.

*Presented by Dave Grant in Escanaba: Sunday, July 27, 2008*

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4:4

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from a sermon by Elton Trueblood, THE YOKE OF CHRIST.