

I love reading the newspaper & I often have a chuckle at the headlines the sub editors come up with. Last week the Herald, had "The Age of beige almost over, as Benaud makes a sporting declaration." Very clever! I remember a couple of years ago the News of the World front page heading delivered the scoop that "*Space Alien backs Bush for President.*" This article claimed that the only reason George W. Bush became the last President of the USA was that aliens had financed his election campaign.

But my favourite newspaper headline was written by the Sunday Sport, a UK newspaper. You see a few years ago, the Sunday Sport had a headline that simply said "*WW2 bomber found on the moon.*" Beside the headline was a picture of the moon's surface with an old military airplane stuck on it with some sort of blu tak. With it was a story that claimed that this plane had bombed the German city of Hanover in 1942, but had become lost on its way home to the UK & by mistake had ended up on the surface of the moon.

The next Sunday, the same picture appeared on the front page, minus the bomber, with the caption "It's Gone!" It was accompanied by a story claiming that MI5 had secretly removed the plane during the week.

But if we were creating a headline for the passage from Acts 16 that we read this evening, one such caption would be "*Jesus arrives in Europe!*" Because although Jesus himself never left the region of Palestine, here for the first time the message of Jesus comes to Europe. Europe that continent with all those fine cathedrals, the place where the Pope lives, the community which kept the gospel flame alive for centuries, first heard about Jesus when Paul preached the good news in Philippi in about 50AD.

Here was a decisive step that the Apostle Paul made which helped to change the world. And it all starts with Paul going to Philippi and being unable to find a Jewish synagogue there. Now it only took just 10 Jewish men to start a synagogue, so there couldn't have been many people in that city who were interested in the Lord. But Paul tracked down a few women who met to pray and told them about Jesus. And one them, Lydia, became a Christian.

Last week, I said that if we were going to change the world, it would often start with a small step. And here we see another small step for man, but a giant leap for mankind. Because here a woman becomes the first European convert. Not a king, not a powerful business man, not a general, but a woman. A woman who prayed but didn't know the one she was praying to. A woman who came each week to worship but still didn't have a personal relationship with God. A woman who was a long way from her home in Thyatira but who that day found her spiritual home with the Lord.

You know that is no different to today. There are still people who come to Church who haven't yet trusted in Jesus. There are many people who pray daily but are not really sure who they pray to. I met one last week in hospital, who told me she prays every day but doesn't believe in God. And there are many people who believe in God, but who know nothing about Jesus. And here Paul has helped change a life just by going to a place of prayer and sitting and talking with the people there about Jesus.

We can do that, can't we? We who want to change the world, we who want to make it a better place, can come and worship God and can come prepared to share with those who are there

also. We can come not just to talk about how our week has gone, or the weather, we can share what Jesus is doing in our lives. We can show how real Jesus is for us and who knows we might set the wheels in motion, to not only lead that person to the Lord, but to make an impact on their world and the people around them.

Because ultimately it was not Paul who converted Lydia, it was the Lord working with Paul. For v14 says "*the Lord opened her heart.*" Yes Paul spoke but God applied the message to her heart. Paul went to worship but the Lord ensured he would find these women praying.

You see ultimately we don't change the world, but God does. We have no power over the future but God does. And he wants us to work in partnership with him. He desires us to step out in faith and he will ensure that our faith is multiplied. For ultimately there are many people around us like Lydia, who are seeking the truth. Who want to know about their Creator but they don't know where to look or even where to start.

For there is today a spiritual hunger in Australia that wasn't there 15 years ago. It's just that people are turning to the New Age, to Astrology, to the occult, to places and people who will touch their feelings and emotions. And often they don't come to the Bible, to the Church, to us. So maybe we need to go to them and be willing to discuss Jesus with them. To make them think about whom they are actually praying to. And as we do that we need to ask that the Lord will open their hearts and that the Lord will lead us to those he is already at work in. That God will bring them into his kingdom, like he did this time with Lydia.

**2. Paul & the Prisoners** I was reading recently about a preacher, Matt Condon who has a set of indicators that will tell you that a bad day is likely, if not a sure thing. Here they are: He says you can be pretty sure it's going to be a bad day when:

1. You call suicide prevention and they put you on hold.
2. Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.
3. Your twin brother forgets your birthday.
4. You wake up to discover that your waterbed has broken...and then realize...you don't have a waterbed! Or if
5. Your horn gets stuck as you follow a group of Hell's Angel's down the freeway.

Well if I was going to add another indication of a bad day it would be "*You know it's going to be a bad day when...you're stripped, beaten and thrown in a jail cell.*" For that's exactly what happened to Paul and Silas next isn't it? They are called by God to take the gospel over to Europe for the first time so you would expect that everyone's arms would be right open in acceptance, but instead they are thrown in the slammer.

That to me looks like the start of a bad day, don't you agree? But Paul and Silas don't act as if it is a bad day, do they? They have been stripped and beaten, flogged, thrown in prison and their arms fastened to the wall and their feet to stocks and what do they do? About midnight they pray & sing songs to God. Their bodies may be imprisoned but their spirits are soaring. Their wounds may be aching but they are still thankful to God. Their legs and hands are stuck but no one can stop their mouths and their voices.

Now I reckon they had every right to be downright angry with God. Or at least disappointed! Or maybe ask "Why God, why did you bring me to this place. And where God, where are you when I really needed you?" They might have said all of that, but they didn't say any of it. They prayed and they sing hymns to God.

Later Paul was to say to this very Church in Philippi, *"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength"*

Now before we see what actually happened, do you think that if you met someone like Paul you would be interested in having what he had? If you saw someone who didn't whinge when they were wronged. Who didn't complain when things didn't go their way. Who was able to praise God and do it genuinely even when they felt the pressure from all sides. Don't you think that there is something very attractive about that person? Don't you think that person would have a greater sense of peace, of security, of the fact that God was utterly and completely in control?

I would, wouldn't you? And I would want to know how I could get it as well. Well Paul and Silas are imprisoned after a shocker of a day and they sing and they pray and they praise God and the Bible says all the other prisoners were listening to them.

Now on one level they had no choice, did they, they too were stuck in prison. They were going nowhere. They were a captive audience, no pun intended. But in another sense even these hardened criminals were impressed with Paul and Silas' attitude, so much so that when the jailhouse rocks and rolls due to the coming of an earthquake and all the chains fall over all the prisoners, they don't go anywhere. Paul and Silas and all the prisoners just stay in their cells!

Now to me that is almost as big a miracle as the earthquake and the fact that Paul and Silas are freed. But I think what kept them in their cells is the feeling of the presence of God with these two Christians. Once again Paul and Silas make an impact, a huge impact on their world by showing how a Christian trusts in God no matter what their outward circumstances. They so exude the presence of God within their lives that people feel safer with them, than freedom from their cells.

So what sort of an impact would people have if they saw us singing God's praises and praying this evening? Would they feel the presence of God? Or would our informality teach them that we aren't really giving God 100%? And what sort of an impact would we have if we were able to praise God in the middle of the dark night as well as at the dawn of a new day, in the highs and the lows, in the pleasure & the pain.

Paul and Silas make a difference in the life of Lydia who was searching for God and a difference in the life of the prisoners who just happened to share a bad day with them. What sort of a difference can we make to those around us if we were content with whatever came our way and if we too always relied upon the Lord God as our strength and our shield?

**3. Paul and the Jailor.** I remember being on a Beach mission at Hat Head, a number of years ago & someone was vandalising our tents and our equipment while we slept. So it was decided that we would take it in turns to sleep in various tents - the big Marque, the Kitchen tent, there was always plenty of guys willing to protect the fridges if I remember correctly, the teenage tent and all the others.

Well this one night it was my turn to look after the junior teens or JT's tent. Well I normally sleep pretty soundly, but I was a bit on edge that night. I didn't really like the thought of

confronting a group of kids with knives or spray cans or whatever. Anyway in the middle of the night I heard some muffled sounds just outside and I froze. Then I saw the flap of the tent open up and a couple of guys crawl on through.

I didn't really know whether I should just pretend I didn't see them or try and stop them. But as I was thinking about it, a voice said "*Steve are you there?*" "*Yeah*" I replied as I recognised the voice of Matt, one of the guys who had been coming to the mission programme each day. Matt said "*Steve, what must I do to be saved?!?!*"

"What must I do to be saved? They were the exact words that the Philippian jailor used to the Apostle Paul, the night that he was whipped, thrown in jail and then a bit later an earthquake came and yet none of the prisoners escaped. So what must one do to be saved?

Paul replied "*Believe in the Lord Jesus - you and your household and you will be saved.*" Believe in the Lord Jesus. It's that simple. Don't just believe in God, believe in Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Realise that it is only when he dies for your sins and when you ask for forgiveness, salvation comes as well as a change of their future.

And we see that the jailor accepts Paul's words, he does believe. And for the next who knows how long, Paul explains to him the implications of that belief. And it is interesting that for Paul the urgency of the gospel takes precedence over his own comfort and security. He still has the raw lacerations on his back from his previous floggings but before anything else he explains to the jailor about the life of faith.

Amazing. And then it is obvious that the jailor understands what Paul has said, he has soaked it all in because before he is baptised what does he insist upon doing? But washing their wounds, fixing up the very beatings that he himself might have given Paul the day before. And then they are baptised and in the wee small hours, the jailor takes Paul and Silas to his own house and fixes them a meal, to eat together. Just hours before he was the representative of an unjust and cruel regime, now they are brothers, equals in Christ, fellow believers.

So friends from this short passage we see Paul does some amazing things that in turn will help change the world. He deals with three people, each in a different way, but each has an enormous affect. To a rich lady during a quiet discussion he answers her enquiring mind and brings her eternal life. To some prisoners, he exploits the fact that he has a captive audience and shows them the joy of being a Christian even in the midst of suffering. And in the midst of a miracle of an earthquake, Paul deals with a man who comes to him with an incredible need and he points him to Jesus.

You see Jesus makes an impact on the rich and the poor, on men and women, on the slave and the free, on the Jew and the Gentile. For all are one in Christ. All find in Him the direction for life, life to the full, eternal life.

The thing is, do we believe this, do we really believe this, not just for ourselves but for our family and for our neighbours. Robertson McQuilken writing in his book *the Great Omission* said "*In a world in which nine out of every ten people are lost, three out of four have never heard the way out and one of every two cannot hear, the Church sleeps on. Could it be we think there must be some other way? Or perhaps we don't really care that much.*" Do we care? Do you care that people are lost without Jesus? That the way to change the world is in all of our hands?

Let me end this evening with just one last thought. And it's from the last verse in our passage, Acts 16:40, it simply says "*then they left.*" You got it, then *they* left. But did you notice that at the start of the passage the writer said *we* not *they*! In 16:16, it says *we* were going to the place of prayer. Luke, the writer of Acts, comes to Philippi with Paul and when Paul leaves, he stays in Philippi. He stays and helps the few Christians and most likely he stays there for up to a year. You see not everyone can have the boldness of an apostle Paul. Not everyone is an evangelist who can naturally tell people the gospel, but we can all be part of the one team. Paul goes. Luke stays. And helps this young Church to grow in faith.

Friends the task of the Church is to tell the lost about Jesus, that's all of our tasks, but some will be more successful at that than others. Not all will be evangelists, not all teachers, not all can help with the kids programmes. But all of us can be supportive, all can be prayerful, all can be encouragers, all can do their bit.

What's your bit? Are you going to go out and door knock? Or are you going to stay and help teach the kids? Are you going to bring a meal to help fellowship or are you going to commit yourself to pray for the work of midweekchurch? Are you going to be a leader or a servant? An encourager or giver? A carer or teacher?

For friends we are out to change the world – We start at Terranora, we move onto the Tweed, to our state, our nation and then to the ends of the earth. And to do that, we all need to find our spot and serve the Lord, through serving others.