

# APOSTOLIC ANGER MANAGEMENT, PART II

Sermon, June 9, 2019

Texts: Psalm 4, Acts 16:22-40 (22:22-29)

As noted last week (and during the Time With the Children just now) Psalm 4:4 says, "In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent." As the Psalmist seems to assume, anger does have a proper place. We are made in the image of God, and the Bible tells us even God can get angry ... His is a perfect anger, to be sure, but the wrath of God is a divine reality. In fact, following worship last week, not a few of you commented to me that you found it assuring that I told you it's OK to get angry ... I hope that didn't encourage any unnecessary fights when you got home, but again, the words of Aristotle: "Anyone can become angry. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way ... this is not easy." In and of itself, anger is not inherently wrong. "In your anger, do not sin." Yes, there will be occasions for anger ... but, as the Psalmist implores, don't let your anger lead you into sin. "When you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent."

It's interesting the Psalmist apparently assumes that one place where anger festers is as we lie around in our beds doing nothing constructive with our anger, which is a most unproductive use of time and energy. We can often lie around just marinating in the vinegar of our anger, can't we? The Psalmist says, "Don't do it!" Rather, as you lie there, search your hearts! Search your hearts and ask questions like: "Why was I angered?" "What might God be trying to teach me through this?" "How can I use the energy of this anger in a productive and constructive and loving way?" "Am I sure I heard or saw everything correctly?" That last question, by the way, is one that can't be asked too often. "Did I take time to try to understand other's circumstances?" "Did I take time to try and see other's points of view?" A lesson I've learned (but, have not always practiced) is that I need to listen to my anger ... to let anger be my teacher, to let it direct me to constructive and productive and loving ends, and then determine to manage the energies of anger constructively, not destructively.

Last week I had planned to look at two prime examples of "Apostolic Anger Management" exhibited by Paul in our reading from Acts 16; I only had time to finish one, so today is part two. Just a little background regarding Acts 16: Paul had received a vision of a Macedonian man calling, "Come help us!" So in obedience to this divine vision, off to Macedonia went Paul and his traveling companions to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The first city they stopped at was Philippi (a city named in the 4th century BC after Phillip of Macedon): in Philippi there was a Roman-built highway that went right up into the heart of Europe. This Roman colony was something of a bridge from the Middle East to the West, and a bustling center of trade between East and West. It was here in Philippi that the Christian Gospel first went westward up into Europe rather than eastward into Asia. The first European convert here was my oldest daughter's namesake, a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. She was probably wealthy, with wealthy clientele, as purple was the color of royalty, power, affluence. Lydia insisted Paul and the others stay with her and enjoy the hospitality of her home.

So far, so good, for the missionaries! They had an enthusiastic new convert who had money and influence and powerful connections, she was eager to help, and she offered the use of her big house, which would be just perfect for the new church that would be planted there. This mission to the West seemed to be working out just fine ... so far. As we picked up the story last week we read about how Paul and Silas had a run-in with some local human traffickers ... Paul rescued their young victim from the clutches of an evil spirit (if you missed last week and want to read about this event, sermon copies are in the back or online at [www.gccp.org](http://www.gccp.org)). We left off where these disgruntled traffickers incited a crowd, dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates and said (v. 20) "These men are Jews, and throwing our city into an uproar." They whipped the crowd into something of an anti-Semitic frenzy with false accusations. To keep the peace, the magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped, beaten, and thrown in prison.

**Now, this is all completely unjust.** Paul and Silas had done nothing wrong. Nothing about this is right or just or fair. For freeing a young girl from her torment they were beaten and imprisoned! Interestingly, later on in Acts, in chapter 22, in another scene altogether, Paul is nearly lynched by the Jews in the Temple area. There's a near riot, the Roman soldiers intervene; they grab Paul and take him into the security of the garrison. The Roman commander orders him to be put in chains and flogged and questioned to find out why he was causing such an uproar, and as they are getting ready to flog him, Paul says, in so many words, "You can't do this to me. I'm a Roman citizen!" Upon hearing this, the centurion who ordered this is scared to death, because of the judgement that could fall on him for having only tied up a Roman citizen, let alone beat one, and especially without a trial ... it's a crime against Rome that could be punished by death! So, the commander of the garrison orders that Paul be untied immediately, he apologizes profusely to Paul, and Paul goes free.

Back to Acts 16. We now know that Paul and Silas are both Roman citizens. They both have this passport in their pocket which will guarantee them careful protection under the law throughout the Roman Empire. And they are in Philippi, a prominent Roman colony. Yet here, these Roman citizens, Paul and Silas, keep their mouths shut in front of the magistrates, as they are beaten and thrown into jail! What's going on? Why don't they announce their identity as Roman citizens, and spare themselves this suffering? There has to be a very good reason. Well, let's follow the rest of the story.

They are thrown into prison, they are chained and put in stocks by the jailer as an extra measure of security and abuse. Note: They weren't lamenting, *"This isn't fair! This isn't just! By the way, Paul, are you really sure about this vision to come to Macedonia? Maybe God didn't say 'Go to Macedonia.' Maybe He said 'Go to Bermuda.' Maybe you misunderstood: I mean, if God wanted us here, why would He let this happen to us? If we're doing what God wants us to do, why do we suffer such? This isn't fair!"* No, that's not how they responded. They responded by choosing to manage their anger in this situation constructively; rather than lamenting, they chose to pass their time praying and singing hymns, which had a profound effect on all within earshot! Well, maybe one of their "hymns" was an early version of Elvis Presley's **Jailhouse Rock**, because that's what happened! (v 26) A violent earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, as the door jambs twisted and hinges broke due to the shifting foundation the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer is alarmed, thinking that everybody's escaped, the magistrates will have his head for this, so he draws his sword and is about to kill himself. However, Paul and his fellow prisoners show this jailer mercy. They don't run away, which would have earned the jailer the death penalty from his Roman superiors. They display grace and mercy to this jailer by staying put, they didn't run away, and Paul yelled out, *"We're all here, don't harm yourself!"*

The jailer is so amazed, so impressed by all this, we're told that he becomes a believer on the spot; he is baptized along with his household. Then in verse 35, we read, *"When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order, 'Release those men.' The jailer told Paul, 'The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.' But Paul said to the jailer: 'They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison.'"*

**NOW** he tells them! He continues, *"And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." Why didn't he say this 24 hours earlier? Why did Paul wait till now to tell them he was a Roman citizen? He certainly would've saved himself and Silas a lot of trouble. Read on. Verse 38 -- "The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed (that's Greek for "they were scared out of their wits.") They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left."*

Now note: Who is this crowd that came out of the prison? Paul, and Silas, and the local magistrates. We have to remember these magistrates are probably terrified. They had beaten Roman citizens, without a trial, and left them chained and in stocks overnight in a prison. They could be literally crucified for this ... **if it is reported**. Paul and Silas take these magistrates along with them as they go to visit Lydia's home, other members of that new faith community were there, and I can imagine they all sort of sat around and exchanged polite remarks and nervous chatter, and Paul and Silas don't have to say a word. But the unspoken point is clear. *"Magistrates, we're leaving town. But there's a growing community of Christians who meet in the home of this distinguished woman, and maybe you should get to know them. This is a community concerned more about reconciliation than revenge. And oh, by the way, if anything should happen to this woman or the people who worship in her house, well ... we just might have to report what happened to us here. And that would be too bad, wouldn't it?"*

It is quite possible the magistrates were both so frightened and so impressed by all this that they became part of that church led by this dynamic and distinguished seller of purple. We know from other sources that this Philippian church went on to become one of THE most influential church communities in the entire New Testament, and hugely influential in the spreading of the Gospel message throughout Europe. Perhaps these magistrates were moved by the mercy of Paul and Silas, perhaps they were moved by these men who were willing to endure great suffering to protect this family of God, to see the family of God grow; perhaps they were moved by these men who **managed their anger** and chose not to report them, thus sparing them the punishment they deserved by law ... perhaps they were so moved by all this that they were ready to learn about a merciful Savior Who was also unjustly flogged and beaten, a Savior Who also bore undeserved punishment, in order to grow the family of God, a Savior Who managed His righteous anger and spared His people from their deserved punishment by His personal sacrifice, a Savior by Whose stripes they, too, could be healed.

Apostolic Anger Management. *"Be ye angry ... but sin not."* Paul and Silas graciously managed their anger to a good and productive end; and in doing so modeled the sacrifice of the Lord they served do faithfully.