

# GREATER THINGS

## Fired by the Spirit of Jesus

Six conversation starters from Easter to Pentecost

### 4. Deliverance with Jesus

#### Video Transcript

Welcome to week four of our series of 'Greater Things' called 'Deliverance with Jesus'. If we're to do greater things with Jesus, we can't let his approach to evil slip off our radar. That was very much the case in the Acts of the Apostles.

Listen to this story in Acts 16:16-34

*Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned round and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.*

*When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, 'These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.'*

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

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 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. But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!'*

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

*They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised. 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 household.*

This is a passage that came to mean a lot to us as a senior team after lockdown. Bishop Philip picked it to form on the basis of some of our study days in 2021. Maybe some of you attended those. But the point is that the living Jesus is able to unlock us from lockdown, not simply reopening our churches, but setting us free from our jailers and from the things that are binding us. I'm here at Lancaster Castle, which for many years was a prison and has been a seat of judgment for hundreds and hundreds of years. Deliverance is one of those words that's often lost in translation.

For many it conjures up freaky elements of horror movies, most famous for the 1973 film 'The Exorcist'. This box office hit featured the demonic possession of a young girl and her mother's attempt to deliver her of a powerful demon who was actually living inside her. She invites some priests to conduct an exorcism. The big impression: this is a threatening world. More widespread on our airport bookshelves, especially for teens, are books crammed with angels and demons. Big impression: this is a fantasy world. But deliverance is neither threatening or fantasy. As the Bible describes, it's an unseen spiritual world of good and evil. This might seem odd to some, yet we might normally talk about 'demon drink' to describe the way alcoholism has oppressed someone's life. Because of the power of cinema and media, we can feel uncomfortable with this language and I do too. But I do think we need to find some language to talk about the times when evil oppresses people

I always find this quotation from Saint Anthony of Egypt, he was one of the original desert fathers, very normalising about demons. He says this: "even if they attack us and appear to threaten death, they ought to be laughed at, rather than feared, for they are weak and cannot carry out all their threats."

We can find ourselves, I think, oppressed by evil, oppressed by evil spirits, especially at points of trauma. But note the important distinction from the cinema. We can be oppressed by evil, but not inhabited. They might trouble us, but they don't live in us. Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Jesuits in the 16th century, was masterful at describing what this sort of oppression might feel like in practice. For example, when you suddenly feel fear, sudden anger, sudden despair, sudden sense of death that lurks.

In our church, deliverance is conducted with care and wisdom, abiding by safeguarding guidelines by authorised ministers. This is one aspect of healing amongst the many resources of medicine. But Jesus did encourage us to pray the Lord's Prayer and the Lord's Prayer deliver us from evil. And the beautifully simple thing is that praying in the name of Jesus in situations of demonic oppression really does work wonders. One of our experienced members of our deliverance team here in the diocese said, "we get used to not always getting immediate answers to our prayers, but this ministry is different. It always seems to work. God's peace always comes."

Here's the thing, Jesus had a PhD in preaching, healing and deliverance. This is a slogan I borrowed from Canon Robin Gamble who set up "Leading a church into growth' course and pioneered 'The Start' course. In today's culture, I find we're quite happy speaking about the first of these, preaching. A little bit about the second, healing. But virtually nothing about the third, deliverance. And yet in Mark's gospel, which is an eyewitness account from Jesus' closest friend Peter, I noticed that the order is reversed. Jesus consistently encountered the forces of evil.

I lost touch with a lovely best friend of mine from primary school when her parents divorced and she moved away. 15 years later, we connected again on 'Friends Reunited' and I found that she had come to faith in Jesus as a young mum. And this all happened because she was keen for her children to go to the local church school. She went along to church, then she was invited to the 'Alpha' course and then she went for confirmation preparation. And when the bishop confirmed her, something unexpected happened. She'd trained as a medium, but after confirmation, she said that it felt like her eyes were opened. She realised that the people she was contacting as a medium were no longer her long-lost family from beyond the grave. She was actually bringing in high levels of fear into her house and she found it was only by praying in the name of Jesus that they could deal with this and bring God's peace.

One of my friends, when I was training to be a vicar, came to faith with Jesus as a teenager because she'd been freaked out by what happened when she used an Ouija board. And again, only the local priest, praying in the name of Jesus, could bring peace and stop pictures from flying off the wall.

I would say I'm finding about one in ten of our parish churches have got stuck. What marks them out are repeated negative patterns, some often rooted in darkness, sin or tragedy in the past. And I don't really understand how this happens, but I'm just saying what I see. A bit like in the British Transport Police slogan that you hear on the trains, see it, say it, sort it, or we'll sort it. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. *"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*



I think this connection between heavenly heavy lifting and earthly reality is often overlooked. And these parishes which have got stuck or locked up were finding that simple things; confessing sin, asking for God's forgiveness is so key. A beautiful way of really manifesting this heavy lifting is quite simply by repentance of key leaders as part of the Eucharist in that place to break the cycles of darkness. I like to call it spiritual hoovering.

We have a deliverance team here in Lancashire from different traditions across the church, each one with a deeply prayerful gift of discerning the spirits, a gift listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, and a gift, as I mentioned before, employed with great normality by Ignatius and the Jesuit movement. This is not a silver bullet. It must be part of a prolonged season of prayer and fasting, but I'm conscious we can have tendencies to rely on techniques and processes that work on the horizontal plane but don't address the spiritual root, the vertical plane, and the problem.

My Egyptian friend Imam, who's a Coptic Christian, she observes that we tend to treat many of our issues as problems/solutions. We manage our way out of issues, but we ignore this vertical spiritual dimension, and by doing so we only diagnose part of the problem. And then we proceed with interventions that dismiss the incredible spiritual riches we have at our disposal; namely the authority of Jesus and his victory over death and hell on the cross.

When Jesus sent his disciples out ahead of him, he spelt things out clearly and simply said, *"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy"* (Luke 10:19). So may this not be an area of fear for us. As Jesus invites us to do greater things than him, may we be aware of Jesus's dominance over the powers of evil. I'm actually recording this here on Good Friday, the day when Jesus literally went to the darkest place of hell and kicked down the gates. His death brought freedom from every curse, every sickness, every darkness, and part of what him breathing his Spirit on us; it's almost like the coming of his kingdom against the forces of evil now.

Evil will not be defeated; the victory over evil will not be worked out totally till the end of time, but we can call on that victory now in our lives, in our communities. Let's pray.

Jesus, would you send your spirit on us afresh? Would you give people who listen to this this gift of discerning the spirits, and in your time, may we spot the patterns of evil, and may, like Peter, we use those keys to bind and to loose. And may you shake the foundations, like you shook the foundations of the prison of Paul and Silas, and release them from their chains. Would you shake the foundations, release people from darkness, and set many, many free. We ask this in your name, and with your authority. Amen.

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#### Guidance Notes

##### Gathering

Welcome members of the group and ensure they all know each other. Consider inviting members to share briefly how their week has been and any stresses or distractions they may have.

##### Introduction and Prayer

Share a short introduction to today's topic.

Open in prayer, inviting God to speak to us as we read and ponder scripture.

##### Scripture

Read Acts 16: 16-34 aloud.

##### Conversation Starter

Play this week's video or have the transcript read aloud.

##### Discussion

Either in your group or alone, reflect on the following questions:

- What stands out to you from the passage we have read?
- What does the passage reveal about Jesus and evil?
- What do you think of when you encounter the word 'deliverance'? How does this compare with popular culture, such as in movies or literature?
- "Jesus had a PhD in preaching, healing and deliverance". Why do you think we tend shy away from talking about deliverance?
- Bishop Jill says that "the victory over evil will not be worked out totally until the end of time, but we can call on that [Jesus'] victory now in our lives and in our communities". Are there particular concerns or challenges that we can be praying and fasting for our church community today?

##### Prayer

Conclude by leading the group in a time of prayer.

Consider using the 'Daily Prayer' section of the Fruitful App to pray the service of morning or evening prayer.

##### Diocese of Blackburn's Deliverance Ministry

If you would like to get in touch with someone from the Diocese of Blackburn's deliverance ministry team, please email [Anne.Beverley@blackburn.anglican.org](mailto:Anne.Beverley@blackburn.anglican.org)