

Last week our sermon was about the first Christian convert in Europe and how she supported the gospel by providing food and shelter in her home for the missionary team of Paul and Silas. Today we ask some questions. What do you do when life is hard and unfair? Do people know that you are a Christian during the bad times? Another question is what do you tell people when they want hope...when they want to be saved? Our scripture today gives us examples of how we can answer these questions.

While they were ministering to those women of Philippi and those that were added to their group, a slave girl attached herself to Paul and the others and continuously shouted that these men were servants of the Most High God and about what they preached, the way to be saved. Her statements were true, but Paul was annoyed – why? The gospel of Christ would be damaged by an association with a demon-possessed slave girl. So after many days . . . Paul exorcised the demon, speaking directly to the spirit, and the demon immediately left her. You would think that Paul and his fellow missionaries would be commended for freeing her from her demon possession, but just the opposite happened.

The charge of the slave girl's owners against Paul and Silas was obviously prejudicial. Shortly before this incident the Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. Philippi, a Roman colony, would have caught this flavor of anti-Semitism. This also helps explain why Timothy and Luke were not taken before the authorities. Timothy was a half-Gentile and Luke was probably a Gentile.

Paul and Silas were accused of disrupting the city . . . by advocating customs unlawful for . . . Romans to accept or practice. Rome permitted the peoples of its colonies to have their own religions but not to proselytize Roman citizens. The civil leaders could not distinguish between Judaism and Christianity, so they saw

the preaching of Paul and Silas as a flagrant disregard and disobedience of Roman law.

The owners of the slave girl caused a riot and spoke words that urged on the crowd . . . the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and beaten with a rod. So, Paul and Silas were severely flogged and then thrown into prison.

Can you imagine how your hopes would have been dashed? You thought you had heard clearly that God had given you a vision to come to an area and to speak for God! What a reception in the first European city where they preached the gospel! The jailer with his strict orders was not going to take any chances so he put them in the inner cell (possibly a dungeon, at least the most secure cell) and fastened their feet in stocks.

What would you have done if you were just being obedient and found yourself beaten and imprisoned? I may have cried all night, and had a “well deserved pity party.” But Paul and Silas have a praise concert in the inner prison. They didn’t just hum and pray quietly. They praised and sang so that everyone in the prison heard them. Rather than being angry or sad; rather than feeling sorry for themselves and their situation; they sang and witnessed to the goodness of God in their lives. They seemed to have joy in spite of their situation. Their praying and singing was heard not only by God but also by the other prisoners and their guards.

At midnight there was an earthquake and God saved them by a supernatural deliverance. The doors of the prison flew open and their chains fell off. It seems that this miracle didn’t just affect Paul and Silas, but all the other prisoners as well. But the strangest thing happened. None of the prisoners tried to escape.

Because the jailer was responsible for any escaped prisoners, he drew his sword . . . to kill himself. But Paul, seeing what was about to happen, called out and reassured him that the prisoners had not escaped. Some scholars think the other

prisoners were so impressed with the God of Paul and Silas that they did not dare flee!

Going into Paul and Silas' cell, the jailer . . . trembling . . . asked, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" This question was filled with significance. He must have understood what he was asking. Maybe he had heard the story of the slave girl and how she had announced these men to be servants of God with the message of salvation. Possibly also the prayers and singing of Paul and Silas had reached his ears. The awesome earthquake with the subsequent opportunity for the prisoners to escape and Paul's reassuring words all moved him to ask how he could be saved.

Paul then makes one of the greatest statements on the message of faith. All that is needed for salvation is faith in the Lord Jesus. The jailer had asked what he should do. The answer was not that he needed to apologize and treat them better. He was not told to do some work for penitence. He only needed to believe in Jesus who is the Lord.

Not only was this Roman jailer offered the way to salvation in Jesus, but also the members of his house, his children and servants, were given at same invitation. Each member believed and were saved.

The jailer . . . washed the wounds of Paul and Silas—an amazing thing for a jailer to do for his prisoners. Then by baptism the jailer and all his family gave testimony to the washing away of their sins.

The jailer took the former prisoners home and fed them! And his family was joyful. The evidence of the victorious gospel was joy.¹

We learn a few things from the story that apply to us in the church.

First when we see injustice happening it is our responsibility as Christian to speak out against it. The young slave girl was being exploited by her owners, who

¹Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:399

were probably a syndicate, who were using her for gain. The girl's fortune-telling ability came from evil spirits. Fortune-telling was a common practice in Greek and Roman culture. There were many superstitious methods by which people thought they could foretell future events, from interpreting omens in nature to communicating with the spirits of the dead. This young slave girl had an evil spirit and she made her masters rich by interpreting signs and telling people their fortunes. The master was exploiting her unfortunate condition for personal gain.²

The gospel frequently challenges systems of privilege, oppression, and injustice. When Paul encountered her she was imprisoned in her situation and had no options. But when Paul delivered her from demonic oppression, it broke not only the spiritual powers that held her, but the economic power of the syndicate that owned her.

Not surprisingly, the girl's bosses reacted to their loss and Paul paid for her liberation by being beaten and going to jail. But despite the injustice, he and his missionary team rejoiced.

If there is some whistle-blowing needed where we work or live, are we willing, are you willing to pay the price to bring justice to others who are suffering?³

Second, praise God through all your situations of life. There is a song that we teach the children:

Praise Him

Praise Him

Praise Him in the morning

Praise Him in the noon time

Praise Him

Praise Him

² Abraham, A. Kenneth, ed., The Matthew Henry Study Bible, 1994, 2261

³ Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1993, The Word In Life Study Bible, New Testament Ed., 479

Praise Him when the sun goes down.

Praising God must become second nature to us. It should not matter that situation we find ourselves in that we don't praise God. Paul and Silas had been mistreated, beaten and locked up like notorious and dangerous criminals for saving the girl from exploitation, so rather than crying all night they chose to praise God for being faithful. For bringing them to the region they gave thanks. For finding welcome in the home of Lydia they gave thanks. For being able to help free the girl from demonic power, they gave thanks. For the ability to sing and praise, they gave thanks. And as a result, God was faithful and rescued them. This was a powerful testimony of their faith. The prisoners that were in jail with them saw and heard their witness and this also had an effect on them. How else do you explain that they did not try to escape when their chains fell off? How you handle your times of crisis may be the witness that your family, friends and neighbors need to want to have your faith.

Lastly, the jailer asked a simple question about how he could be saved. So many Christians are afraid to witness about our faith because we are afraid that we can't answer that question. But the words spoken to the Philippian jailer are the best news human ears have ever heard, because they clearly tell how we receive God's gift of salvation. When we receive God's gift. We are delivered from the penalty of sin, which is death and separation from God. We receive salvation by faith, by believing that Jesus died for our sins, that His death was in our place, and that His payment for sin is fully acceptable in God's sight.