

Scripture Reading:

Acts 16: “16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

"A Jailer is Converted"

We have before us perhaps one of the most memorable of the stories recounted by Luke in his orderly account of what was fulfilled among them written for his friend Theophilus.

- A Roman jailer in Philippi comes to the Lord Jesus for salvation along with all of his household!

It is a dramatic and encouraging account, but we must also remember that this joy came with a great cost for Paul and Silas! As we move on through the Book of Acts, Paul and his companions will often pay dearly for doing the right thing.

- This is why we often see “joy” and “suffering” so closely related in the New Testament.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that for the joy set before Him Jesus endured the cross and James tells us to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

These are the lessons we will strive to learn from our text this morning, but I also want to touch again just briefly on the account of the demon-possessed slave girl. As I mentioned last week we will come to another demonstration of demonic activity in the 19th chapter of Acts which we will study at greater length at that time. There is a flow to the account that Luke has given us leading up to the conversion of the jailer and his family and this young woman is certainly at the center of this activity.

However, Luke tells us almost nothing about her other than the fact that she is a slave, both to man and to this demon.

Many of the commentators want to see three dramatic conversions here in Acts 16, with a wealthy businesswoman Lydia, a lowly slave girl and now a Roman official coming to Christ.

However, while we certainly pray that this young woman was converted, we need to be careful that we do not assume what Luke does not tell us.

- She is freed from the demon, but we are given NO insight as to whether this led to her conversion.

IF we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture I think this account comes more as a warning than as an encouragement, because it is very similar to the type of situation Jesus referred to in Matthew chapter twelve: While confronting the Jewish leaders about their unbelief, Jesus gives them three chilling warnings:

Matthew 12:41 “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.”

- EVERYONE has an obligation to repent when confronted with the preaching of the Gospel!

42 “The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.”

- Jesus, the greater Solomon, said “if you love me keep my commandments!”

And finally, 43 “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. 44 Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.” “

We have bookends of salvation on either side of this young girl, and while we pray that this experience also *brought her to salvation, Luke does not specifically tell us that it does.

- And so it serves as a warning to all ages that the call of the Gospel must be taken seriously!

Cleaning up our lives or even something as dramatic as having a demon cast out is not enough: We must join with Lydia and this jailer and believe the Gospel: “That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, saving us from the penalty & power of sin! Because Jesus teaches that if this slave girl was just relieved to have the demon gone and went on living her life in her own strength, then her end was much worse than the beginning.

- The Bible speaks of the saved and the lost, the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares...
- There is never a third option!

With that as our warning, let us go on to consider the joy that came to this Philippian jailer’s household!

While we do not know what happened to the slave girl, we do know what happened with her masters:

- The love of money trumped the Gospel!

Rather than see the power of what Paul and his companions brought in word or actions, they could only see that they were going to lose money because the demon was gone. *There was NO fear of God!*

Sadly there are many who ignore the Good News that brings eternal life for the sake of very fleeting things like money, fame or even relationships. So these men with hardened hearts then lashed out at those who were to blame and did so in a way they knew would cause great harm to them.

- They wanted revenge and, from a human perspective, they succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

First they singled out Paul and Silas rather than Luke and Timothy because they were clearly Jewish and could more easily be seen in those times as ones who deserved to be persecuted. As we move through Acts it is more often the Jews who cause trouble for the Saints, and it is interesting to note that in both cases where Gentiles led the charge it involved the loss of money.

- Something we should certainly take careful note of living in the midst of our prosperous nation.

So these men pick an easy target and a ready subject: *"These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."* They did not argue in public that these men had cost them money: That would not have rallied the crowds.

- They go straight for the thing that often does rally a crowd: Patriotism or national pride!

These men are troubling OUR city, they are teaching things that are unlawful for ROMANS to believe!

They work up the crowd and then appeal to the Roman magistrates to take action against Paul & Silas.

Now what takes place next was not only unjust, but illegal since Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. We will consider this in more detail next week. It appears that the actions of this day take place so rapidly that these Roman leaders act rashly to quell the crowds and that Paul and Silas have no opportunity to raise any objection as Paul did in other situations. In order to satisfy the crowd that has been worked up into a frenzy by the owners of the slave girl, the magistrates not only beat Paul and Silas but cast them into prison as well.

- I don't want to be too graphic but we need to understand that what Paul & Silas were put through was NOT pleasant! *[explain]*

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of Paul and Silas for a moment:

- Your great mission work has been interrupted by some greedy slave-owners.
- They worked up a crowd and had you illegally charged and beaten to within an inch of your life.
- And now you are in a cold damp prison cell with your wounds untreated and your feet in stocks.

What a great time for a pity party!

- But, such was not the case with Paul and Silas:

Paul would later write about this event to the Saints in Thessalonica: "even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict"

Paul & Silas knew they had been called by God to preach the Gospel: Now they had to be wondering as they sat in pain in this dark prison why the day had not turned out a bit better from a human standpoint... They did not yet know that this time of unjust trials and testing would lead to the conversion of the very jailer who put their feet in those stocks...

- A story that would encourage the Saints for thousands of year!

So Paul & Silas did what any faithful disciple should do in a time of great suffering or tribulation: They prayed and they sang hymns to God!

- They did not know why they were being treated this way, but they knew & worshipped the God who did!

And so they lifted up prayers to Him and worshipped Him in song. So what did they sing? Martin Luther had not yet written A Mighty Fortress, nor had John Newton given us Amazing Grace!

I think I am on pretty safe ground to make the case that they would have lifted up mostly hymns from the Jewish hymnal: The Book of Psalms.

- **Singing and praying in the midst of this great trial would have brought them great wisdom and comfort.**

Think how both could have flooded over them as they prayed the 23rd Psalm in that damp cold cell: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”

- **I can also see Psalm 2 being sung that night!**

As we read through the Psalms in our devotions, we will see many other places they could have turned as well. This praying and singing not only brought wisdom and comfort to Paul and Silas, but Luke tells us that the other prisoners were listening as well. We are not told if these other prisoners were converted, or even what happened to them after Paul & Silas were taken out of the jail.

- **However, the fact that they did not flee after the earthquake loosed their chains shows what an impact this witness of singing by Paul & Silas had on them. *[All of this should remind us of the importance of teaching Psalms & hymns to our children]***

The reference to midnight in verse 25 is the time stamp for when the earthquake took place and so Paul & Silas had sung and prayed for some time prior to this miracle:

- **In fact it is likely that the jailer himself would have heard them and greatly wondered about how they could respond in this way.**

God sent Angels to release Peter and the other disciples from prison in Jerusalem, but here He sends an earthquake:

- **Yes, we serve the God of earthquakes and here He demonstrates His control over them in an extraordinary way!**

The foundation is shaken, the doors fly open and the chains were loosed: However, the building is still standing and no one loses their lives. The jailer is awakened and horrified by what has happened. He sees the doors of the prison open and rightly assumes that the prisoners have fled. As we saw with the guards charged with Peter’s restraint in Jerusalem this man knew that the penalty for letting prisoners escape would be his own life.

- **As was the Roman custom, this jailer determined to do the “honorable” thing by taking his own life, when suddenly he hears the Apostle Paul cry out to him.**

Now we need to remember that our missionaries had been in Philippi for many days at this point: There would have been much talk about the strange teachings they had brought to town. The mob action and public beating would certainly have gotten everyone’s attention this day and now these men were under the jailer’s watch. Whether or not he heard their prayers and singing that night he would have heard about the demon possessed slave girl who had rightly said, “they proclaimed the way of salvation.”

The jailer is shocked or at least surprised to hear the voice of Paul and calls for lights to inspect the prison. Seeing the focused power of the earthquake on the doors and chains and all the prisoners still inside brings this man to the point of repentance.

- **God has given him the gift of faith and so he brings Paul and Silas outside and says, “Sirs what must I do to be saved?”**

Paul gives him the simple Gospel and the same promise that Peter gave those under conviction in Jerusalem at Pentecost:

- **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”**
- **Then Paul and Silas proceed to speak the word of the Lord to the jailer and his household**

Verse 33 is so rich in imagery that it almost deserves a sermon of its own. The jailer is a new man and now serves those he had just a few hours before gone out of his way to make miserable.

- **Luke tells us “he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes.”**

Luke then says, “immediately he and all his family were baptized.

- **Paul and Silas are washed with water to heal stripes inflicted on them by men.**
- **The jailer & his family are baptized with water into their new life in Jesus: Cleansed by His blood!**

We see clearly with this jailer what Paul would later describe to Titus: “3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

- **Jesus came to bring life and life abundantly and this is what we see here in the midst of what could have been seen as a very dark night.**
- **Paul & Silas beaten and chained could have despaired.**
- **The jailer thinking his prison destroyed and prisoners running free did despair to the point of being ready to take his own life.**

But now just hours later, Paul and Silas understand why they needed to be in THAT jail on THIS night and the jailer is celebrating his new life.

- **Together they rejoice over the food that is set before them!**

Paul and Silas; Timothy and Luke, Lydia and her household, this jailer and his household and prayfully the young slave girl long ago passed from this life and are now in paradise with their Savior Jesus as He promised.

The writer of the Hebrews reminds us that they have not only gone on before us... But they are now part of a cloud of witnesses who testify to us and encourage us to live out the great truth that Jesus gave to those who are given the gift of faith:

- **If you love me, keep my commandments!**

I want to close this morning with that reminder from Hebrews with selected portions of chapter twelve, which as you should know follows the great hall of faith in chapter eleven:

Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, & let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

29 For our God is a consuming fire."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 42:

" As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. 8 The Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, And in the night His song shall be with me-- A prayer to the God of my life. 9 I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" 10 As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.