

“Justice”
Acts 16:35-40
(Preached at Trinity, March 14, 2007)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we saw earlier in the chapter Paul and Silas were arrested because Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl. Actually, they were arrested because they angered the wealthy and obviously influential masters of the slave girl. With the slave girl delivered from the demon possession she could no longer do her soothsaying and the masters lost this great source of income.
Paul and Silas had their backs stripped bare and they were beat with rods and then thrown into prison.
2. Paul and Silas demonstrated their heart of faith through the ordeal. At midnight probably suffering greatly from their beating they were filled with prayer and praise. What a positive testimony to the other prisoners who heard them.
Acts 16:25 – “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.”
3. Suddenly an earthquake shook the place and Paul and Barnabas suddenly found themselves loosed from their bonds.
Acts 16:26 – “And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.”
4. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped the jailer drew his sword and was prepared to kill himself. He was a Roman soldier given responsibility for the prisoners. The penalty for a Roman soldier who lost a prisoner was execution. In such a case it was more honorable for the soldier to take his own life.
5. Seeing what was about to take place Paul shouts:
Acts 16:28 – “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.”
6. The jailer then responds with the most important question a person can ask:
Acts 16:30 – “what must I do to be saved?”
7. Paul's answer provides the key to eternal life.
Acts 16:31 – “. . . Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. . .”
8. The Jailer did believe. His heart was transformed by the mighty power of God which was demonstrated by his new love for Paul and Silas.
 - A. He cleansed their wounds and brought them to his house and fed them. His heart was united with their hearts. Though they had just met he loved them and demonstrated his love by his actions.
 - B. This is the testimony of every true believer. He is filled with love.
9. Apparently this was no dereliction of duty. The jailer's duty was to be able to produce the prisoners when they were called.

10. The remainder of the chapter contains an unusual passage. Paul and Silas had been taken to the jailer's house where they probably spent the night or they may have returned to the prison. When morning dawned several officers who had been dispatched by the magistrates arrived to order the release of Paul. Paul's response will be the focus of our attention tonight.
11. In this passage we can glean several important truths concerning our relationship to the civil authorities.
 - I. First, the Bible makes it undeniably clear that we are to submit to the civil authorities
 - A. We live in a culture of lawlessness
 1. It is promoted on many fronts
 2. The freedoms we enjoy under our democracy often make us forget our duty to honor authority
 - B. We are under the direct command of God to obey the civil authorities
 God has delegated this authority to the state – it has been ordained of God
Romans 13:1 – “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”
1 Peter 2:13-15 – “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:”
 - C. Our confessional statements adopt the Biblical position
1689 Confession – “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him, over the people, for his own glory and the public good; and to this end hath armed them with the power of the sword, for defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers. Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid; subjection, in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake”
BF&M – “Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the will of God.”
 - D. Calvin from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
 “The first duty of subjects towards their rulers, is to entertain the most honourable views of their office, recognizing it as a delegated jurisdiction from God, and on that account receiving and reverencing them as the ministers and ambassadors of God. If we have respect to the word of God, it will lead us farther and make us subject not only to the authority of those princes who honestly and faithfully perform their duty toward us, but all princes, by whatever means they have so become, although there is nothing they less perform than the duty of princes.”
 1. This duty to obey our civil authorities is not limited by the righteousness of the magistrate.
 2. We can't overlook that the civil authorities in power when Paul wrote the charge for us to obey was Rome – the very power responsible for the crucifixion of Christ.
 - E. Paul's example demonstrated here
 1. Paul could have easily escaped when the earthquake occurred. Not only did he remain he convinced the other prisoners not to escape.

2. Compare with Peter who escaped at the command of God
Acts 12:11 – “And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.”
3. Our obedience to the civil authorities must never usurp our obedience to God
Matthew 22:21 – “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.”

II. As Christians we should always seek to promote justice and speak against acts of injustice

- A. The magistrates ordered the release of Paul and Silas
 1. We are not told the reason for their decision
 - a. Some surmise that their decision linked the earthquake to the events of the previous day – probably not likely
 - b. Some say it is possible that the magistrates knew that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and wanted to free themselves from their guilt of mistreating them. **Verse 38** however, seems to imply that they did not know that they were Romans
 - c. Most likely this was simply the prudent thing to do. The crime of Paul and Silas had been punished. The crowd had been satisfied. It would be best for the peace of Philippi if these two men were exiled from the city and forgotten.
 2. They sent officers to deliver the order to the jailer – the literal meaning is “one who carries the rod.” These were the ones used to beat Paul and Silas the day before.
 3. The jailer received it as good news – his brothers in Christ could go free
Acts 16:36 – “And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.”
- B. Paul's actions seem strange
 1. Why make waves? Paul and Silas had been terribly beaten the day before. It doesn't seem wise to antagonize those who ordered the beating.
 2. It would seem prudent to seize this opportunity for freedom
 3. Paul was speaking in the interest of justice – God loves justice
- C. Paul had been treated unjustly
 1. Paul was not willing to let the magistrates simply cover it up
Acts 16:37 – “They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast *us* into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily?”
 In other words Paul was saying, “They beat us openly, now are they going to send us out secretly?”
 2. Paul and Silas were Roman citizens with the rights of Roman citizens
 - a. The charges against them had not been properly investigated
 - b. Roman citizens were exempt from degrading forms of punishment.
 - c. Roman citizens not properly convicted could not be expelled from a Roman city
 3. Paul was defending himself from mistreatment contrary to the civil law

4. There is another example of Paul defending himself from injustice
Acts 23:1-5 – “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. ² And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. ³ Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, *thou* whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? ⁴ And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? ⁵ Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.”
 - a. Paul was defending the law
 “sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?”
 - b. Notice, however, Paul’s respect for authority
 “I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.”

III. Christians are allowed to defend themselves from false accusations

- A. This is true in every realm of authority
 1. Children should be allowed to explain their actions and defend themselves of allegations.
 2. Employees should be allowed to defend themselves before disciplinary action is taken.
 3. In a church, a member should be allowed to offer a defense when brought up for disciplinary action
 In the Trinity Constitution and By-laws a member is allowed to offer a defense. Under Article II – CHURCH DISCIPLINE
Section 3. If the church votes to entertain a complaint, which must be presented in writing at a regular business meeting, it shall appoint a reasonable time and place of hearing and notify the person in question thereof, furnishing him with a copy of the charges.
Section 4. At such hearing, the accused member may call to his aid any member of the church as counsel. If he shall not present himself at the time appointed, or give satisfactory reasons for his neglect so to do, the church may proceed in his absence.
 4. Civil authorities should also seek proper justice by allowing the accused to offer up a defense. This is the basis of our nation’s rule of “due process” guaranteed in the 5th Amendment of the Constitution
 - a. Paul and Silas were brought up on false accusations
Acts 16:20-21 – “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, ²¹ And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.”
 - b. They were then punished without being able to defend themselves
- B. Christians are also allowed to speak against the improper use of authority
 1. This is what Paul is doing here and also in **Chapter 23**

2. Jesus also spoke against the improper use of authority
Matthew 23:13 – “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”
3. This doesn’t excuse us from honoring the authority
 - a. This is why Paul didn’t escape from the prison
 - b. This is also why Paul apologized for speaking disrespectfully to the high priest.
 “I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.”
4. We have a duty to honor those who are in authority. We obey and submit for their office sake.
 - a. When they act improperly we have a right to respectfully speak against the action
 - b. Paul describes this principle concerning pastors
1 Timothy 5:19-20 – “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. ²⁰ Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.”

Conclusion:

1. As Christians we are to be meek, humble, submissive, obedient. We are to people that respect those whom God has placed in authority.
2. When it is necessary for us to speak against those in authority it must always be done with respect and honor.
3. May God grant each of us wisdom and purity in this area.