

Shaken!

August 11, 2019

Acts 16:25-40

Last week, we left Paul and Silas in the middle of a traumatic situation. After freeing a young slave girl from the slavery of a demon, her angry owners dragged them before the city magistrates, who had them stripped, flogged, and lock in shackles in the most secure part of the prison. That is where we left off the story from Acts 16, today we pick up from there.

Let me begin by reading the story of what happened next. READ Acts 16:25-40.

Main point: God's purposes do not get put on hold when something unfair happens to you.

It seems to me that Paul and Silas understood this concept. How else do you explain them spending their night in jail by praying and singing hymns? The praying I understand, but singing hymns? And it might even be that they were preaching, since the text tells us that the other prisoners were listening. Indeed, there in the Philippian jail, something miraculous and almost too bizarre to believe took place. It seems that an evangelistic crusade took place, complete with multiple baptisms, shared meals and treating of wounds off site, and yet when morning came everything was as it was when the night began. Truly, this was a most bizarre night in the Philippian jail!

So, as we go through this text, it ought to remind us that God's purposes are not thwarted by man, even unfair treatment by man. Indeed, it may just be that God wants you, needs you to be in that exact spot so He can do something through you that only you can do. He surely did that evening with Paul. He might just do that with you... (2 parts)

I. You never know whom God might call, nor how He might bring it about. vv. 25-34

I'm sure virtually all of us would have been distraught over the beating and jailing experienced by Paul and Silas. Perhaps most of us would have questioned whether we were doing what God wanted us to do, whether we had made mistakes in listening to God. I doubt any of us would have considered it an evangelistic opportunity. And yet, what happened that night ought to give us pause over our superficial understanding of the will and purposes of God. He does not see life events as we see them. He knows more than we know. His ways are beyond us. It seems to me that Paul's relationship with God was so close so as to be able to grasp what we would naturally miss. It seems a major part of the Philippian church plant team could only be reached in the inner part of the Philippian jail!

v.25- About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

We could spend the whole of this sermon just pondering this verse. Here they were, beaten, bleeding, hurting, wondering what would happen to them next. And yet it was midnight, pitch black, and they were holding a worship service. And unlike what you would expect in a jail, the other prisoners were listening, not mocking, not warning them to shut up or else. They were impacted by this middle of the night, in the dark, heartfelt worship by two strangers in town. They were intrigued, not turned off. They wanted to know more. Now, we don't know what ultimately happened to those prisoners, but we infer from the text that in the morning, they were all still there. Even though all were freed from their bonds, none of them seems to have escaped. It appears they willingly stayed there in the jail.

I had contact earlier this summer with a pastor who spent time in jail. As he told his story, I heard him tell about the transformation that took place in his heart during his time there. When he came in he was angry, but as time went on, his heart softened and he saw purpose for his time there. I wanted to talk with him further to test out my theory, but it did not happen. It seemed to me that he went from feeling like God had punished him by sending him to jail to God

going with him into that jail, that God was not punishing him, but going with him.

I suspect Paul and Silas had that attitude, that God had sent them to jail, that Jesus was right there with them, not sending them as punishment or abandoning them without care. No, the events that took place unfairly led Paul and Silas right where God wanted and planned for them to be. God was at work!

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 everyone's bonds were unfastened.

Yes, I think it would be safe to say that God was at work! I notice that the text presents it as a great earthquake, but the building was still standing and the people in the area do not even mention it later in the story. So, it seems to me that the earthquake was only on site, and the consequences were not so much the result of the earthquake as it was specific workings of God. In other words, I can understand the foundation shaking and doors opening, but the shackles becoming unfastened? For everyone? That doesn't sound like an earthquake.

I can't help but notice the parallel to what took place with the girl and what took place with the prisoners. All were set free by the hand of God. Now, if I had been one of those prisoners, I think I would have seen it as a sign to run. Right? But given no mention of the jailer fearing for his life the next day, I take it that none of the prisoners left. They could have, but they did not. They were freed in the middle of the night, but they stayed. I would love to hear more of this story. I think there is more we could learn.

27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

The jailer was thinking exactly as I was thinking. He was done. Roman law was that if your prisoners escaped under your watch, you took the punishment due them. So, when the doors were all opened, he knew he was a

walking dead man. If they escaped, he would die for it. So, he was ready to end his life. Why wait for what you know is coming? Notice he did not seek to make excuses. He accepted responsibility for something that wasn't his fault! Hmmm...

28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

Right in that moment, Paul rescued him. Since it was dark at the time, it is hard to imagine how all of this took place, but it is clear that Paul saved his life. There was no reason for him to die. No escape had taken place. He was not responsible for anything. What had just happened was not a revolt, nor simply an earthquake. It was God setting prisoners free. And in this case, free did not mean leaving the prison. They were all free, but they were all still there.

29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.

When light finally came on that dark place (double meaning intended), the jailer had the response we would have wanted and expected. The jailer recognized that he was in the presence of a spiritual power greater than himself. He recognized this as a God event that caused him to tremble even more than having all his prisoners escape. How do you approach a spiritual power this great? You fall before Him with fear and trembling. Now, we know that Paul and Silas were not this God, but at this point in the story, the jailer did not know.

30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

I take from this verse that the message of the slave girl had somehow gotten to him. She had been proclaiming that they knew the way to be saved. These men knew the God who saves. He had seen the power, he surely was impacted by the attitude of the singing and praying men. That was enough for him. "Where do we go from here?" he asked. Just point me in the right direction.

Imagine the change of perspective. He is the jailer. They are his inmates. Yet, they are the ones who can tell him where to find freedom. What a reversal!

31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

It can't get any simpler than that. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus. The essential ingredient to salvation is belief in Jesus. Now, we know that there are specifics tied to that belief. It doesn't mean simply believe that He exists. It doesn't simply mean a belief in His sacrificial death on the cross. It means belief that He did it for me, that were it not for His death on the cross for my sin, I would be condemned. It means not mental agreement to a set of facts, but a belief from the heart that changes my direction in life. It means we believe He is who He says He is, and did what He said He did. It means taking Him at His word. It means believing that if He promises His followers eternal life, then His followers have guaranteed eternal life. So, yes, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,” is a simple statement, a true statement, a promise from God Himself. But it is deep, life changing, profound in all of its details. No statement can compare to “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

I pause over the “you and your household.” In what sense does Paul mean this? Does this mean if the father believes, the whole household will be saved? Not at all. The truth is that every person will stand before God by himself. The belief has to be personal. But it does indicate that salvation naturally flows in the household. Statistics would show that families where the father becomes a believer have the highest rate of others within the household coming to faith. So, there is a connection between the faith of the father and that of the family.

In reality, though, this phrase, “you and your household” tells us that the promise extends beyond him, to those around him. What Paul is declaring to the jailer equally applies to those most dear to him. In other words, it is a promise to all, not just extended to the jailer to whom it was spoken. It is a promise for the ages. Whoever you are, whatever you've done, the promise is true for you, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

This is where the flow of the story could use more detail, but the point is clear. The jailer took Paul and Silas at midnight to his home, where Paul gave the same message to the man's family. They heard the same promise, just as we had guessed.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

There, they ministered to Paul and Silas, binding up their wounds. Paul and Silas ministered to them, leading them to Christ and baptizing them in their newfound faith. Salvation came not only to the jailer, but to his whole family as well.

34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Can you see the bonds being formed? There was ministering back and forth, a spiritual bond, and now a shared meal. Remember, all of this took place after midnight. Notice the joy experienced by the man and his family. Salvation had come to their household. The church in Philippi has just grown!

I marvel at the thought that none of this was planned. I doubt any of it was expected. And yet, God did something unbelievable that night. God's plan to grow His Church took some unexpected turns, complete with the miraculous, prison shaking, chain breaking. None of it was by the plan of man, all of it was accomplished by the mighty hand of God. This is what expansion of the kingdom looks like. Light came to a dark place that night.

II. We would all do well to know the facts before we mess up people's lives. vv. 35-40

Even though we have been quite clear that Paul and Silas' night in prison was by God's plan, that doesn't mean those responsible for it should be let off the hook. Those city magistrates needed to learn a lesson. But did they??

35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.”

I suspect that the city officials had completed what they set out to do: show Paul and Silas who was boss and teach them not to do such a thing in their fair city ever again. In other words, at this point it was not remorse that caused them to let them go, but that their intentions were completed. They made their point.

36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.”

From this verse, we see that Paul and Silas are back in the jail. That is what makes this whole story so unbelievable. They were put in the jail, had the whole middle of the night evangelistic event complete with a trip to the jailer’s house for the celebration and baptism, and the night ends with them back in jail! I wish we knew more. What a story! So, we pick up here with the city official declaring that his purposes were complete, the two men were free to go. Just don’t make any disturbances again, “go in peace.”

37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.”

How do you like that one? They refuse to leave the jail. They demand an apology and personal escort out of the jail by the city official. Why? Because both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and citizens had rights.

We know from other documents that Roman citizens were under the protection of Rome. They could not be flogged or detained without cause, that they could always appeal to appearing before the Roman court in Rome if they chose. In other words, with a kingdom spread out so far, with so many different people in that kingdom, there were protections for the true Romans, the Roman citizens. Yes, the local officials had power, but it was limited by Rome. A local official who was found abusing Roman citizens was in serious trouble. In other words, local officials want nothing more than to keep the peace, but the thing

they feared more was having Rome come down on them. They had power, but Rome had MORE power. This magistrate was in trouble. Paul demanded an apology.

38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.

Paul got the apology he demanded. He got the escort out of jail. But they also asked him to leave the city. In other words, we can't make you leave, but you had better be on your way. In other words, we may have gone too far, but we'll be watching you. You had better leave now. Yes, you have rights, but we do have authority here.

40 So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

They left town, but not before they met with Lydia and the church. This fledgling church was bigger, stronger, encouraged as Paul and his party left town. Philippi would never be the same.

Again, I want you to notice the special place that Paul had for Philippi. Of all the letters Paul would later write, the letter to the Philippians does not contain chastising. It is a letter of encouragement, in the same tone as we see here in Acts 16. "Be of good courage."

So, as Paul and Silas leave for the next town, what do we have? A church, though perhaps small in number, but made up of dedicated Jewish women and a joyful local jailer and his family. Yes, Paul had made his mark on this Roman colony, but on to the next city, Thessalonica.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) Trust God's leading in your life.
- 2) Share His perspective on your situation.
- 3) Be joyful despite the crud of life.
- 4) Make the gospel simple.
- 5) Build up the household of God.
- 6) Believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved!