

A Changed Family
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Acts 16:22-34

Opening: Do you have any examples of a time when God used the suffering of a Christian (yourself or others) to “preach” to others about his grace and salvation?

- Big Idea: God uses our influence to lead others to Him. Sometimes He specifically uses a tragedy or crisis in the life of believer to reach them.
- We pick up our study of Acts in chapter sixteen.
- Paul and Barnabas dissolved their partnership into separate ministries.
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy embarked on Paul’s second missionary journey to Europe. In a vision God draws them to the Roman-ruled city of Philippi in the region of Macedonia (modern day Greece.)
- Paul begins his mission work by witnessing to a businesswoman named Lydia and she and her whole family were converted and baptized.
- The missionaries ran into major resistance when a demon possessed fortune telling girl identified them as servants of the “Most High God.”
- The girl was a slave who made good money for her owners by her demonic fortune telling. When Paul called upon God to cast out the demon, the profits evaporated and her owners dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates.
- The accusation was that these Jews were causing a disturbance with their strange, foreign religion which the Romans did not allow. We pick up the story in verse twenty-two.

Acts 16:22–34 (NLT)

²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer

was ordered to make sure they didn't escape.²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

- “Severely beaten” with rods means their naked backs were shredded.
- The stocks were not only to keep them secure but to inflict more pain.
- Amazingly, in this bloody and painful state Paul and Silas rejoiced!

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.

- A Christian who praises God in the midst of pain always has an audience!

²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself.²⁸ But Paul shouted to him, “Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!”

²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

- The word “saved” in this text can mean rescued from trouble, saved from death, or eternally saved.
- It doesn't matter how the jailer meant his question because Paul and Silas gave him the ultimate answer – and they said it so simply:

³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.”³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household.³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before

them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

- Let's unpack this amazing story of grace and salvation.
- Wouldn't it be wonderful if unsaved people were drawn to faith in Christ because they observed how easy and attractive it is to be a follower of Jesus? *"The Christian life is so exciting and fun with no bumps in the road, where do I sign?"*
- Often young children or even teens are saved before they've experience a lot of life's trials, but think specifically of adults.
What circumstances lead many, if not most, adults to salvation? What kinds of situations make them more open to the gospel?
- The reality is that salvation generally results because someone's life is in a mess! They realize they are out of answers and the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to their only real solution: forgiveness of sin and faith in God through His Son Jesus.
- Often a person responds to the gospel not only because THEY are in a mess, but because of how they've seen the grace of God at work in the life of a suffering saint. They see a follower of Christ who deals with a seemingly unfair and tragic life event with unimaginable grace, hope, and even joy and THAT is what draws them to want what that person has.
- Humanly speaking none of us wants to go through a painful life crisis.
- Heavenly speaking, God uses the example of His miraculous power in the lives of Christians to get the attention of those who don't yet believe. In this morning's text we see all of the above – suffering saints, a desperate pagan, and God's unmistakable miraculous power that led to the salvation of this jailer and his whole family.
- I don't know about you, but if someone beat me severely and threw me in prison on bogus charges I'm probably not sanctified enough to have a late night worship service. Most likely it would have been a pity party!

Charles Spurgeon wrote: "Any fool can sing in the day...It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skillful

singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by ... Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men.”ⁱ

- As amazing as Paul and Silas singing in the midst of their pain is, there’s something more amazing to me. Read 16:35-39.
What’s interesting?
- **If Paul and Silas had a “get out of jail card,” why didn’t they use it?**
- Wiersbe: *“Why didn’t Paul and Silas plead their Roman citizenship? (see Acts 22:25–29; 25:11–12) Perhaps there was not time, or perhaps Paul was saving that weapon for better use later on.”ⁱⁱ*
- Another theory: **How might Paul have been helping the cause of the Philippian church when he asserted his rights as a Roman citizen?**
- *In verse 37 “Paul requests a public display of his innocence. This would provide official affirmation that the Church had done nothing illegal and would further strengthen the Church and the position of the new believers in the community.”ⁱⁱⁱ*
- Was it courage, restraint, or just that things happened too fast? We’ll never fully know why Paul and Silas didn’t immediately yell “Roman citizens” when they were arrested. What’s for sure is that God orchestrated this painful ordeal to reach the jailer and his family.
- Spurgeon believed the jailer would have been an influential convert in Philippi and speculates that he might have remained a jailer: *“Some zealous people are in a hurry to give up their secular callings. Such would say, “I cannot be a jailer any longer. I must give it up.” A Roman jailer would have much to do which would grate upon Christian feelings, but there was nothing positively wrong in the office. Somebody must be jailer and who so fit for the post as a man who knows the Lord and will, therefore, manifest a gentle, humane spirit? Who so fit to have poor creatures entrusted to him as one who will not swear at them, or treat them roughly, but who will seek their good? Why, I think if a man wanted to be a missionary to those who needed him most, he might desire to be a jailer, for he would be sure to get at the very people who most require the Gospel!*

The Philippian convert was in his right place, and instead of saying, "Ah, I must give up my situation and live with Christian people," he was wise enough to stay at the jail and abide in his calling."^{iv}

- If the jailer DID remain in his job, he would have made an influential missionary and witness!
- One important theological point: there is no such thing as "group" or "family" salvation. This text doesn't mean that because the jailer believed, his family was automatically saved. Verse 32 says Paul "spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." They all heard and believed individually. I imagine they were a receptive audience!
- **How does this story speak to you? How does it speak to your view of times when we Christians are suffering saints? How would it influence your own reaction to a time of trial in your life as others are watching and listening?**

So, What's the Takeaway?

- When a child of God is suffering, it's only natural to ask Him, "Why?"
- This story brings home to us the reality that sometimes our influence to bring people to Christ comes from the way they view us when we're in the midst of suffering and trials.

Quoting Spurgeon again:

"The members of this elect family could by no other means be brought to Christ but through Paul and Silas being cast into prison! And, therefore, into prison they must go—to do more by night in their chains than they could have done by day if they had been free—and to bring to Christ some that would be more illustrious trophies of the Grace of God than any they could have gathered had they been preaching in the streets of Philippi! God knows where it is best for His servants to be and how it is best for them to be! If He foresees that they will do more good with their backs scarred than they would have done if they had escaped the flagellation, then their bodies must bear the marks of the Lord Jesus and they must rejoice to have it so! Brothers and Sisters, we do not like the sick bed—we would not choose aching limbs—And yet in our temporary imprisonment we

have seen the Lord's wisdom and have had to look back with thankfulness upon it. Oh, children of God, your Father knows best! Leave everything in His hands and be at peace, for all is well. May the Holy Spirit work quietness of heart in you.”^v

- That thought directs us to a great prayer for every follower of Christ:

“Lord, when you take me through a valley of suffering, help me to trust in You and lean on your sufficient grace in such a way that my trial becomes a witness for someone who doesn’t yet know you.”

ⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 468).

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 468). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ac 16:37). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

^{iv} <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons59.xxxviii.html>

^v *ibid*