

## A Jailer, Two Prisoners, & An Earthquake Pleasant Plains 12-16-2018PM NICK ANGEL

- **\*READ Acts 16:16-24\*** Throughout Paul's ministry he often found himself in difficult circumstances. In fact, if we were playing Bible trivia and asked you to tell me the text/time where Paul did some preaching and teaching, someone didn't like what he said or did, and he ended up in prison...then you would probably look at me like I'm crazy because nearly that exact description could be found in a number of different points in Paul's life. Further, Paul's life was full of difficult circumstances.
- Such difficult circumstances can be found in what he wrote in **II Corinthians 11:23-27** with imprisonments being included in the list. However, even with all of the difficult circumstances, Paul continued to possess an attitude that recognized that God was with him, and that he could still accomplish great good for the benefit of the kingdom and the glory of God. (**II Timothy 4:17**) We might say that Paul was really good at making some really good lemonade with the big bunch of lemons given to him in his life as a Christian and Apostle of Jesus Christ.
- These truths about Paul's life can be found throughout his ministry, but what takes place in Philippi with the demon possessed girl, their imprisonment, the earthquake, and the jailer is a perfect microcosm of Paul's life as an Apostle. This evening, I would like for us to focus on this story of a jailer, two prisoners, and an earthquake that not only shook the jailhouse to its foundation, but we will also see how it completely changed the life of a jailer who thought his was over.

### I. The Story

#### A. Paul and Silas are jailed for healing a demon-possessed slave girl. (Acts 16:14-24)

1. Following the conversion of Lydia and those who were gathering at the river to pray, we find the Paul continuing to go about from place to place in Philippi taking the Gospel to those who would have been in great need. However, Paul is seemingly accompanied by a constant shadow in the form of a slave-girl who was possessed by a spirit which gave her the ability to tell the future. Luke notes for us that the owners of this girl were making a great profit off of this girl's abilities by selling the fortunes of those who would come to them.
2. This girl was following around Paul making proclamation that he and those with him were *"bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the/a way of salvation."* After putting up with this girl's antics for some days, Paul finally becomes annoyed and casts the demon out of the girl. This of course was a great service to the girl for she was no longer being controlled by a spirit, but her masters were none to pleased because their cash cow was now no longer going to be able to bring in the money through her abilities.
3. Therefore the masters took hold of Paul and Silas and drug them before the city authorities. Their accusation was that Paul and Silas were causing a great commotion in the city by proclaiming customs and teachings that were not appropriate for Romans. The authorities and the people all became very upset, tore their robes, and proceeded to beat Paul and Silas with rods. After taking a beating, they are taken to prison where they are bound together around their feet with stocks. A visit that had started off with such promise had sadly ended in them losing their freedom and ability to teach the masses.

#### B. While in jail, Paul and Silas are praying and singing praises to God. (Acts 16:25)

1. However, Paul and Silas were not going to allow such a situation to stop them from using their time to give God glory, honor, and praise. Instead of moaning and groaning about their circumstances, we find these two men using their time in chains singing praises to God.
2. We'll notice that this was not only something that benefitted Paul and Silas, but those prisoners that were there with them were also able to hear what was going on. We often talk about how our singing teaches those who might hear it, and we find a perfect example of such a thing happening here within this text.

- C. **An earthquake frees the prisoners, and the jailer seeks to take his own life. (Acts 16:26-29)**
1. Yet the story only continues to get more exciting as an earthquake shakes the jailhouse to its very foundation to the point where the doors were opened and prisoners were freed from their chains and had the opportunity to escape. The jailer on duty seems to have fallen asleep prior
  2. to the earthquake, but obviously woke up with the commotion. He awakes to what he perceives is an all-out jailbreak. In his mind, the only thing awaiting him was going to be certain death for his failure to keep the prisoners secure, so he takes out his sword and is ready to go ahead and end his own life before it is ended for him.
- D. **Paul and Silas talk the jailer down, and they are able to teach him the Gospel to which he and his house obey. (Acts 16:30-34)**
1. Thankfully, Paul and Silas were able to talk the man down from killing himself by showing him that all of the prisoners were still present and accounted for. The jailer is obviously extremely relieved and asks for Paul and Silas to please tell him what he needed to do in order to be saved. No doubt this man had heard these two men praising God and knew them to be men of great faith and conviction.
  2. Paul and Silas respond that he needed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved, but they also added that he needed to share this news with his entire family. Luke records that they went straight away to get Paul and Silas cleaned up, and at that same time the jailer and his family were all baptized. The jailer even went on to bring Paul and Silas into his home where he sat food before them and rejoiced together in the Lord.
  3. It is soon after this that those who had locked Paul and Silas up were willing to release them, but Paul wanted for those who locked them up to come and do it themselves. They eventually come, Paul and Silas were released, and they make their way to Lydia's home where they are able to encourage the brethren. Sure this was a drastic change of events for everyone involved, and there are some great lessons that we will take a few minutes considering together as we bring our study to a close.

## II. The Lessons

### A. Doing good will sometimes be punished.

1. The reality is that Paul did something that was good in this instance! He had taken a spirit out of a girl, and through this she was able to have her life back without being influenced by anything else. Paul had done something that was beneficial for the girl, but of course the men who had been making money off of her fortune telling were not pleased with what Paul had done. For his good deed, Paul did not receive praise, thanks, or appreciation. Instead, he received the punishment of a bad beating and being locked up in prison. Surely Paul understood our common saying that no good deed goes unpunished.
2. Jesus would've also been well aware that this happens from time to time. How many times do we remember Jesus doing the good deed of healing on the Sabbath, and yet he was accosted by the Scribes and Pharisees for His good deeds. We must recognize that there are going to be some people who simply are not going to appreciate the good that we are trying to do in this life, and while it is quite sad...the truth is that it does in fact happen, and it happens for various reasons. Sometimes it happens because there are times when others benefit from bad things and you fixing them or helping them cuts them off. That's what happened with Paul here in our text. Other times, people simply don't appreciate when others are willing to step up and do something that they may not be willing to do ourselves. It is always important for us to remember that we are to work hard and do good with all of our might. **(Ecclesiastes 9:10)** Will there be times when others don't like it, don't appreciate it, and might even do us wrong for it? Sure that might happen, but we must only seek God's glory not the glory of men.

## B. God should be praised at all times.

1. As we mentioned at the beginning of our lesson, Paul experienced a lot of difficult things in his life. That list in **II Corinthians 11:23-27** is pretty extensive and maybe even somewhat difficult to comprehend, but at the end of the day Paul's only concern was for the Lord and the strengthening of His kingdom and His people. It has always impressed me that at the end of that incredible list that Paul states that his worry was only for the churches that he had a part of strengthening. He wasn't worried about himself, but he was going to give effort to make sure that God was glorified in whatever he went through.
2. This is clearly seen in our text where Paul and Silas have just been beaten and are currently in chains, and yet they are found praying and singing praises to God! I am convinced that their actions are what would eventually lead the jailer to ask them what he needed to do in order to be saved. Their example should stand out strongly in this text and it should remind us that this type of reaction to difficult situations is demanded of us. We know that we are to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in all situations (**I Thessalonians 5:16-18**), but sometimes those situations are not the best. Regardless of their circumstances, Paul and Silas were willing to praise God, and their strong example should motivate us to do the same because we don't know what blessing from God might come as a result of the difficulties. For these men, that blessing came in the form of an opportunity to share the Gospel with a lost soul.

## C. We should be merciful to our enemies.

1. At the time of the earthquake, the jailer who was supposed to be watching the prisoners had fallen asleep, and he believed that all of the prisoners had escaped on his watch. He knew that such a mistake on his part would only lead to his death, so he drew his sword and was just about to kill himself, but instead of letting him do such a thing Paul called out to him and begged him to not go through with it because the prisoners were still there. At the moment of this happening, this jailer was for all purposes an enemy of Paul. He had been a part of the group that had jailed him for doing a good thing. Would anyone have batted an eye if Paul had not stopped him from killing himself? I mean...that would have been one less enemy standing up against him in his efforts for the Gospel.
2. However, Paul showed his overwhelming love for all people by calling out to this man and stopping him from killing himself and jeopardizing his eternal soul. Paul saw a man who was in desperate need of something to look to as a reason to stay alive, and Paul did what he could to make sure he didn't take his own life. He showed this man mercy, when many others might have just let him do what he was going to do. This is the same kind of mercy that God was willing to extend to us while we were his enemies (**Romans 5:10**), and it is the same kind of love and mercy that we ought to have for those who try to stand against us in our efforts for the Gospel and living Godly lives. (**Matthew 5:44**) We should hope and pray for their repentance and turning to God.

## D. Those without hope desire to be saved.

1. As I mentioned, this man was seemingly without hope in his life with things being what they were, and it is fascinating to me what this man asks of Paul and Silas. Instead of getting back into full-out jailer mode, the man comes into where Paul and Silas are, falls at their feet, and asks them what he needed to do in order to be saved. What an incredible question to ask at this very moment! This man goes from almost killing himself to then asking what needed to be done in order to be saved! This man realizes that he was without hope and sought to find some reason for living. What better reason to live than to live for God.
2. Again, I want to reiterate how powerful it must have been for him to hear Paul and Silas singing. There is no doubt in my mind that he recognized that Paul and Silas were different

kinds of people by doing what they were doing by rejoicing during their trials. This man seems to have desired to have the type of hope and faith that they had which is why he asked such a question. Stacking a couple of these lessons together, I wonder who around us might be impacted by the faith and hope we display when we face difficulties in this life? When we are going through a difficult trial, are we rejoicing in the Lord? If we are not then we might very well be missing out on opportunities to encourage and others to seek the hope that we have in Jesus. This man's lack of hope led him to inquire about the truth, who around us might want to ask that question? May we live in such a way and shine our light in such a way that others might know that we are people to whom they can ask such a question.

#### E. Baptism is necessary and urgent for salvation.

1. The original reply of Paul to this man's question about what he needed to do in order to be saved was simply, "*Believer in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" (**Acts 16:31**) Those who advocate for a belief only salvation experience might very well take this very and use it as a proof text for their belief. However, it is very interesting to me that just after this verse we find Paul, Silas, and the jailer going to have their stripes washed and immediately the jailer and his entire household were baptized. If baptism isn't necessary for salvation then why would these people be so quick in doing such a thing?
2. All around us we see baptismal practices where a person confesses Christ as their Lord and Savior and then sometime later after enough people have been "saved" and want to be baptized then there is a big baptism ceremony. We definitely don't see too many people being baptized in the middle of the night. However, it seems as if the teachings of Paul concerning believing in Jesus must have included the importance and necessity of baptism. Which is why they would have gone and done a thing so quickly without any delay.
3. This reminds me much of how Philip simply preached Jesus to the Eunuch, and it was the Eunuch that stopped the chariot and asked what prevented him from being baptized. Philip's preaching of Jesus must have included the necessity and importance of baptism in order for the Eunuch to desire so great to be baptized. (**Acts 8:26-39**) Adding this together with Paul's own experience with baptism that he recounts in **Acts 22:16** about not delaying, and it becomes perfectly clear that baptism is a necessary and urgent part of the salvation process that ought not be delayed.

Once again in the life of Paul we find him taking the lemons of life and turning them into a nice sweet pitcher of lemonade. Was he wrongly punished? Yes. Was he in a bad spot? Sure was. Did he allow for such circumstances to hinder his service to God? Absolutely not! May Paul's example of making the best out of a difficult situation stand as a motivating factor within us to never allow our situation to keep us from praising God. May we show love to those who are without hope and how might even hate us. May we always encourage people to pursue the grace of God and the hope it brings before it is too late. As always, may God be glorified in our lives, this week, as we seek to live for Him in all that we do.