



Bound Yet Free

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 16:16-40

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This is one of the most amazing texts in the Book of Acts and not just because it is filled with astounding miracles and an incredibly memorable scene in a jail cell. It is an amazing text because of the maturity, the persevering faith, the joyful resoluteness, and the kingdom mindset that we see in Paul and Silas. And it is a text of interesting contrasts. In this text we see a girl with astounding occult powers who is able to tell the future, a man who is jailer and who has power over imprisoned men, and Paul and Silas, beaten and confined in a prison cell and the truth of the matter is this – though Paul and Silas are physically bound, they are the only ones who are truly free. This medium, this slave girl, has astounding powers but she is a slave to Satan and a slave to wicked men. The jailer has the power of physical life and death in his hands, but he, himself, is prisoner of sin. Paul and Silas are bound in a jail cell, constrained by chains and stocks, but they alone are truly free, because of the grace of Christ, and they live like it. This is an amazing story and I don't want to delay getting into this text so let's pick it up in verse 16 and get going this morning.

It is a week after Paul and Silas, together with Timothy and Luke, have been ministering down at the river in the city of Philippi. Last week, Eddie took you through the conversion of Lydia, a God-fearer whose heart God, by His grace and according to His sovereign power, had opened to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ – both her and her household. You remember that they had gone to the riverside because it was considered to be the place of prayer. There was no synagogue in Philippi. There was not a large enough contingent of Jews living in Philippi to allow there to be one. Jewish tradition demanded that there be at least 10 worshipping, Jewish men for a synagogue to be founded. And what that means is that since there was no synagogue, there was no significant worshipping Jewish population. This is a principally Roman city. So here we are, at least a week later, seeing these men again down by the riverside and what takes place there sets the stage for the rest of the text. We read:

“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”” (Acts 16:16–17, ESV) As these men are on their way to the riverside to continue evangelizing the people of Philippi, they encounter a slave girl -- a young girl with a spirit of divination. In the Greek, this is a really interesting description. Literally it says that she had the “spirit of Python.” According to ancient myth, Python was a snake that guarded the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. There are several different myths surrounding the temple, but the common thread is that Python would speak thorough demonized people – people, called Pythia, who possessed and indwelt by demons and who would go into these trances -- sometimes violent -- and tell the future. This was a real thing, ok? This wasn’t a put on. This was not a trick. It was demonic. This demon that indwelt this girl had very real insight into the spiritual world and was able to tell the future with accuracy. Now, of course, there would have been a demonic spin on it, a deliberate effort to turn people away from the true God, to keep people from a knowledge of saving truth by obscuring the true God of Scripture, but this was real, the fortune telling was accurate, and it was very wicked and spiritually poisonous.

So they encounter this girl, possessed by an evil spirit and pimped out by unscrupulous men whose only concern for her was how much money she could make them and, believe me, she was an extremely lucrative piece of property. This girl was in double bondage – to Satan and to wicked men. And she followed Paul and the brothers around, crying out repeatedly, repetitively, continually, loudly -- “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

Now what is going on here? This demonized girl is speaking the truth, right? What she is saying is factually correct. Why didn’t the demon lie or attempt to discredit Paul and Silas? Why did this demon continue to cry out that these men served the Most High God and that they were preaching the way of salvation – the only way of salvation through Jesus Christ alone? That’s a good question and here is the answer. Though the demons hate Christ with a demonic passion, they nevertheless are forced, compelled, to confess the truth about Him when they are confronted by Him and in these men, indwelt with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, these demons were being confronted by Christ. Their demonic hold in Philippi was being challenged.

So Paul and Silas have a walking billboard following them around, a demonic herald of their ministry, and Paul is not happy about it. Luke says: “And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.” (Acts 16:18, ESV) Apparently this went on for a long time, interrupting Paul and Silas’ attempts to preach the gospel, drawing attention away from the message, being a spectacle that got in the way of the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Finally, Paul had had enough. Being greatly annoyed, in the power of Christ, he performs an Apostolic miracle and casts the demon out of this poor girl. It’s probably the only miraculous deliverance ever performed out of annoyance. You can see how Paul could have gotten annoyed, right? Have you ever been trying to have an important, a life-changing conversation with someone when another person keeps interrupting and deliberately trying to disrupt your conversation? That’s what’s going on here and Paul was tired of it.

Some people try to spiritualize this by attempting to read into this another motive – and certainly Paul would have been concerned for the spiritual condition of this poor girl – but the fact is that Paul is annoyed – a word that means “to be strongly irked or provoked at something or someone.” In fact, this word is only used one other time in the Scriptures and this in Acts 4 where it describes the agitation and consternation of the Jewish religious leaders over the preaching of the apostles. This demon was obscuring the preaching of Christ, in essence trying to reduce the gospel to the same level as the demonic utterances of this slave girl, reducing the gospel to the level of the occult and demonic, trying to confuse the message. It was impossible to preach, impossible to get a train of thought going and Paul had had enough. And though the demon was compelled to speak the truth about Jesus and specifically the gospel that they preached, Paul and Silas neither wanted nor needed the validation and commendation of someone under the sway of Satan. They commanded the demon to depart.

Paul, as an Apostle, casts this demon out – not through a series of deliverance sessions, not by extravagant methods, but by simple faith in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this encounter gives us some things to think about. We see here that demons know who Jesus Christ is and they can confess the truth about Him, but stating who Jesus is, is not the same as confessing faith in who Jesus is. That is particularly important for us to recognize in this age of spiritual deception and confusion about the truth. There are many voices out there that claim to have the truth about Jesus and the truth about the One True God, but the only fully reliable and inerrant truth about Christ is found in the Word of God. If what someone says about Jesus – whether preaching a message, or in a book, or in a movie, or as a result of some vision, or as a result of a dream, or as a result of some special revelation they claim to have received – if what

they say about Jesus does not square with the plain teaching of Scripture, you must reject it wholeheartedly. Anything like this is only an attempt, a demonic attempt -- even if the person may not be aware that it is so -- to misrepresent and confuse the truth about Jesus Christ. Don't misunderstand me at this point. I'm not saying that all people who err are filled with a demon. Of course it is possible to err on points of theology and to do so unintentionally. But we must also be aware that Satan is the father of lies and all spiritual deception ultimately comes from him.

So Paul casts out this demon and we see something else very clearly. Satan is no match for Christ -- it's not even a contest. The power of Christ to overwhelm and destroy the power of Satan is put on clear display. It is an awesome spectacle and it is only the beginning to a very long day. See what happens next: "But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.'" (Acts 16:19-21, ESV)

The owners of this slave girl who had been liberated from the oppression of demons are incensed. Their hope of gain, their hope of profit had been exorcised just like that demon and they are angry beyond measure. So they lay hold of Paul and Silas and bring them before the magistrates, two men who were appointed to share in the rule over the city of Philippi, and they bring charges against them both -- Timothy and Luke are left out of it. And just look at these charges, because they are really indicative of their hearts. First they say -- These men are Jews. Anti-Semitism was alive and well in the Roman Empire. The Jews were absolutely hated by the Romans and so the first accusation is one that is racially motivated. It is racism, pure and simple. Then they say -- they are disturbing our city. They are causing divisions, stirring up riots, agitating the city and causing uproar -- a total lie, a complete fabrication spun out of whole cloth. Then last they say -- They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice. This is the only charge in the group that has any merit at all. There was a Roman law on the books that prohibited the practice of any religion that was not officially sanctioned by the Roman Empire and a part of their official religious pantheon, but the truth is that this law was seldom enforced at all. In fact, in the overwhelmingly vast majority of cases, it was only applied to Christians.

In reality, they are trumped up charges that mask the real issue. The real issue is that the implications of the gospel, the rule of God, the power of Christ, the might of the Holy Spirit has impacted and affected these men's lives in a way that they do not like. When you are not in spiritual state of mind, not in a teachable mind – when you are confronted with the truth and become angry at it, you will look for any scapegoat, any escape to avoid the weight of the truth. And that's what these men were doing. That is the issue. Think about it. What else are they going to say? "We are really upset that Paul freed our slave girl from demonic oppression and as a result we have lost all ability to make some cash off her sorry state." Doesn't have the same flair, does it? It sounds awfully selfish and self-seeking. They have to come up with something that sounds more plausible and more selfless and philanthropic.

Their concern is not really for the well being of the city, not really for the laws of Rome – that's all a subterfuge. The real issue is that they do not like the power of Christ being brought to bear upon their lives and so they respond quickly and venomously. It really is not surprising – it happens a lot. As soon as the gospel truth and its implications, the reign of God and His Christ, hits someone where it hurts and they respond negatively, the reaction – more often than not – is swift, harsh and severe – discrediting the source, misrepresenting motives, just throwing anything out there to see what will stick in order to avoid the truth. Many times the reason for rejecting the truth is not the actual issue and that is the case here, just as it was for our Lord Jesus Christ. At any rate, these guys are persuasive.

These men stir up a mob. They conspire and incite the crowd. Notice this. People, who moments ago did not even have any of these concerns or thoughts that these men are voicing about Paul and Silas, pile on. It's an old fashioned lynching. "The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." (Acts 16:22–24, ESV) Paul and Silas are not given a trial. They have no chance to defend themselves at all – they are immediately judged guilty and sentenced in a matter of moments. The magistrates have them beaten with rods – long sticks of bamboo or something like it – usually in groups of three – stiff but with enough "whip" to cause horrific damage to the back, kidneys, and ribs. Then, Paul and Silas were taken to the jailer with the order to be kept secure and they are thrown into the inner prison – in the very bowels of the jail -- like solitary confinement, the most secure place in the prison and their feet placed in stocks – their legs stretched out at the most painful of angles -- so they cannot escape. It seems like overkill doesn't it? They have just been beaten half to death. Is all of this necessary? It is if

you are the magistrates of Philippi. These men have already demonstrated remarkable power in Christ, power unlike anyone or anything else – casting out a demon with a word, power superior to anything they have ever seen. They have to do this. It shows their fear but it also shows the irrationality of sin. Do they really think that the power of God that is with these men can be defeated like this? The next scene is remarkable.

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,” (Acts 16:25, ESV) This is getting even more amazing. Beaten half to death, confined to the lowest part of the jail in filth and squalor, rats scurrying around, their backs flayed open and exposed to the dirt and foul floor of the prison cell, at midnight, Paul and Silas are praying and singing. And the words that are used here give us a very clear picture of the state of their hearts. The word for “praying,” the way that it is used here, is a word that means not the prayer of “deliver me from this situation God, strike down my adversaries” but more the sense of communion with God, praising God, extolling and speaking with the Lord -- praise and communion and worship and adoration. And the word for “hymns” is a word that means, “to sing a song of praise.” Here are these men, in the worst possible conditions, having been beaten and imprisoned for faithfulness to Christ -- not for sin -- and they are praying and praising God, singing to the Lord, probably from the Psalms, filled with real, palpable, tangible, substantial joy. How can they do this? Really that’s the question isn’t it? Everything in our natural man, everything in our flesh would want to do the very opposite. How can these men pray and sing with real joy in the midst of such horrific circumstances?

Here’s why. Because they see with eyes of faith and feel with a heart of faith in Christ. They are not seeing things through natural eyes, not feeling things with a natural heart – but with gospel eyes and gospel hearts and that makes all the difference. Paul and Silas trust in the sovereign hand of God; they trust in His providence; trust in His heart for them. They know that God has not abandoned them. They know that what has befallen them is not some chance thing, but has been ordained by the hand of God for His glory and ultimately for their good. They know whom they have believed. They know that they are secure in the hands of Christ. They can confess, as Paul would later write, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day

long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:31–39, ESV) This is what motivates them. They are confident in the love of Christ, confident that Jesus loves them with a steadfast, enduring, redeeming, never-ending love. They know that no matter what they are enduring, it is not because Christ’s love for them is wavering or growing cold – it can’t. They see with eyes of faith.

They are convinced that they are not suffering for their own sin. As Paul had said earlier in Acts 14:22-- “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22, ESV) They knew the words of Christ: ““Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11–12, ESV) This is not just empty and dry theological fact – this is truth to be believed, truth to stake your life and your joy upon. And joy that is rooted in the gospel knows no circumstantial limitations; it has no expiration date, it knows no boundaries, it cannot be diminished, it cannot be extinguished. True gospel joy prevails over every enemy of the soul because it is rooted in the Satan-crushing, soul-freeing gospel of Jesus Christ.

Beloved, here is the thing about Paul and Silas’ suffering for the gospel and about ours as well. There is a divine purpose in trial; there is a reason for suffering. Do not think that God has forgotten you; do not think that God has rejected you. Do not think that God has withdrawn His love from you. That is not it at all. Instead, God is at work to refine your faith and advance the gospel in you and through you through the fires of trial and adversity.

Beloved, we must understand that trial, difficulty and suffering are a part of following and proclaiming Christ in this fallen world. None of us is immune and some of us know it full well. Scripture repeatedly reminds us of this:

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Romans 8:16–17, ESV)

Paul later wrote to the Philippian church that was being founded in Acts 16: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.” (Philippians 1:29–30, ESV)

He later wrote to Timothy, who was accompanying him in Philippi, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” (2 Timothy 3:12, ESV)

We are certain to suffer in some manner if we follow Christ and live for God’s glory and often in ways we never would have expected. Sometimes we suffer because of the hatred of the world toward us, sometimes it is because of the sins of other people, sometimes we suffer simply because we live in a fallen world and sometimes our trials and sufferings are the result of our own sin for which God must discipline us, but what is in mainly in view here is suffering for being faithful to Christ. These trials will come to us in a variety of ways; they are different in kind and vary in degree and in intensity but they are all serving a divine and loving purpose -- to make us to hold fast to Christ and to treasure Him and the hope that is only found in Him and to make that hope known to others.

God uses trials in our lives to strengthen our character, to make us more like Christ, to develop His life in us. It is part and parcel of the necessary process that God is carrying out in our lives to conform us to the image of his Son, because it is through Christ-like people -- like you and me -- that God carries out the purposes of His gospel in this earth. Paul and Silas did not shrink back from that. It is like John Calvin said: Whomever the Lord has adopted and deemed worthy of His fellowship ought to prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with very many and various kinds of evil. It is the Heavenly Father’s will thus to exercise them so as to put His own children to a definite test. Beginning with Christ, His first-born, He follows this plan with all His children.

And it is right at this point where the truth of God’s sovereignty and His unfailing love in Christ gives strength and hope and endurance to His people. In the most difficult of trials, in the hardest of circumstances, we must be convinced that God has ordained our afflictions, that He has lovingly fashioned them for His purposes, that He sovereignly reigns over all of them, that

He will give us strength to victoriously endure through them and that He will use them all to accomplish His glorious purpose to fashion us more into the image of Christ and to advance the gospel in a way that it could not advance otherwise. God will not let us go.

Specifically in this text, the suffering of Paul and Silas was the way that God would further build the church in Philippi. They had no way of knowing that in the moment, of course, but they trusted in God just the same. Their singing and praying was not based upon the certainty of a happy outcome but on their confidence in a good and sovereign God. These two had enough confidence in God to know that He was still in control—that He could and would use even this painful, dark situation for their good and His glory. That is why they prayed and sang and rejoiced in the Lord in the dungeon. God’s grace, through His spirit, strengthened them. It was Charles Spurgeon who once said, “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.” And the other prisoners took notice.

The prisoners were listening to them...I have no way to be certain of this, but I am convinced that the inmates at Philippi had never heard anything like this coming from the pit of the jail. They didn’t just hear Paul and Silas; the idea is that they listened to them with interest – they were interested in what they heard. Their joyful witness to God arrested their attention. Not groans but songs came from their lips. Instead of cursing men, Paul and Silas blessed God – no wonder the other prisoners were listening to them. Testing like this revealed what was in their hearts in a way that ease never could. Now, this was not a conscious evangelistic strategy – at least I don’t read it that way. Paul and Silas were not singing and praying so that they could be good witnesses in this situation, but because their hearts were full of faith toward God and because they were confident in their standing in Christ, the overflow of their worship was witness.

Immediately, something amazing and unexpected took place. “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.” (Acts 16:26, ESV) The sound of singing and praying is suddenly drowned out by the sound and fury of an earthquake. God moves in an unexpected way, announcing His presence in the jail cell with power. The whole prison shook, all the doors flew open and everyone’s bonds were broken. It is the perfect opportunity for a jailbreak...but it never happens.

“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. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”” (Acts 16:27–28, ESV) Awakened by the earthquake, seeing the prison doors open and assuming that all of the prisoners had escaped, the jailer is about to kill himself rather than face the torture and execution that would await him. But just as he was ready to kill himself a voice, the voice of Paul, stays his hand. “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” I’m not sure what is the greater miracle – the earthquake or that all of the prisoners stayed put. No one had left. Everyone was still in his or her cell. God had set everyone free, but they had remained where they had been imprisoned. Why didn’t these prisoners run? Because they were arrested by the presence and power of God. Why didn’t Paul and Silas hightail it out of there? Because the earthquake was God’s assurance to them that He could set them free any time He so desired. God could and would take care of them and that gave them the courage and strength to stay. They were there in prison by the design and purpose of God and they knew it. They stayed where God had put them for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ and for the sake of this jailer.

“And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.” (Acts 16:29, ESV) This is a hardened man, most likely a former soldier in the Roman army. He comes into Paul and Silas’ jail cell and does the unthinkable – he falls at their feet. Why? Because he knows these men possess power, power unlike he had ever experienced before. No doubt, he had heard of Paul’s casting out of the demon, knew of the testimony of the slave girl that these men preached the way of salvation. He had put them in the lowest and highest security jail cell supposing that they would be bound and secure there. Nothing prepared him for what happened. This jailer was forced by the supernatural confirmation of Paul and Silas’ message to realize that he must come to terms with the God they preached, the God they served. God was at work in his midst and in his heart. The Holy Spirit had arrested the jailer’s heart.

“Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”” (Acts 16:30, ESV) He asks them the most important question in human history, the supreme question of theology, the question that makes all others pale by significance. Sirs, what must I do to be saved? This is no academic question. This is most urgent question in the world. It is an urgent question because apart from Jesus Christ, all are lost. It is an urgent question because we all are one breath away from eternity.

It is an urgent question because nothing else will matter when we stand before the righteous Judge of the earth. It is an urgent question because it must be answered personally. It is an urgent question with a very simple answer. Unlike all of the other religions in the world, the right answer to that urgent question is simple.

“What must I do to be saved?” There is only one answer: “And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.” (Acts 16:31–32, ESV)

Again in Romans, Paul wrote, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, ESV). That is the answer and the hope for every person throughout time, space, and history. Believe in the Lord Jesus – believe in His sacrificial and atoning death for your sin, to save you from the judgment that you deserve. Believe in Christ’s love for sinners demonstrated by His willingness to lay his life down as the atoning, salvation-winning, forgiveness-granting, hope-giving sacrifice for your personal sin. Believe in the Lord Jesus. Paul and Silas went and preached the gospel, preached the Word of God to the jailer and his entire household and God, in His grace, gave them all faith to believe.

The jailer believed in the Lord Jesus and his life was instantly changed and it shows in his actions. “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. 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.” (Acts 16:33–34, ESV) Oh, beloved, again we see portrayed before our eyes in the Book of Acts this truth – the grace that saves is the grace that transforms. He washed their wounds – the evidence of compassion and kindness; he and his family were baptized – evidence of obedience to the commands of Christ; he took them to his house and fed them – evidence of fellowship and communion in the Lord; and they all rejoiced – evidence of worship and praise of God. The grace that saves is the grace that transforms.

It was an amazing night filled with gospel fruit, but when morning came, Paul and Silas were still in jail. “But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” 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.” 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.” The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens.” (Acts 16:35–38, ESV) This is not an issue of Paul being a pain or insisting on his rights and wanting to make a scene. That is never Paul’s heart. Instead, there is something bigger here at work. Paul is seeking to protect the fledgling church that is taking shape in Philippi. He is trying to give them standing in the community. By voicing his Roman citizenship and forcing the magistrates to acknowledge their wrongdoing rather than sweeping it under the rug, Paul is ensuring that this young church would not be threatened any time soon by these men who had made such a mess of things already. That is the meaning of what Paul is doing.

“So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.” (Acts 16:39, ESV) Paul’s insistence had its desired effect. The magistrates come to him and in essence beg he and Silas to leave the city. But before they go, we read this postscript: “So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.” (Acts 16:40, ESV) On the way out of town, they visited Lydia and they encouraged the brothers and departed. Just who are those brothers? Some of the household of Lydia and of the Philippian jailer we can presume – but why not just say that? I have no way to prove it conclusively, but I believe those numbered as brethren included some of the men who had been prisoners with them, now set free in their souls through faith in Christ.

This is an incredible text. What do we need to take from it? What should we build our lives upon?

The first question that we need to answer in light of this text is simple. Do we trust, really trust, in a sovereign, omnipotent God? Even in the darkest night of our souls, even in the worst of trials, do we trust in His providence; trust in His heart for us, know that God has not abandoned us, believe that whatever we are facing is not some chance thing, but has been ordained by the hand of God for His glory and ultimately for our good? Are we confident in the love of Christ, confident that Jesus loves us with a steadfast, enduring, redeeming, never-ending love? The sovereign love of God must be the bedrock truth of our lives.

Second, are we fully engaged in receiving the Word of God, tearing down any obstacles that can come between us and the reception of God's Word? Trust me, Satan will use anything to try and get you to reject or set aside the clear teaching and implications of the gospel, just as he did with these men in Philippi. He 's not discriminating. Anything he can use, he will use.

Third, let's think about the answer that Paul gave to the jailer's question. "Believe in the Lord Jesus." It is a simple statement, but it means everything. It is a simple phrase, but it is an all-encompassing, life changing, world changing truth. It is the key to everything – to salvation, to faith and to life. If you have Christ, you have everything. He is of inestimable worth, to be treasured above everything else. No matter what our lot in life is, our Christ is with us. Do we have the midnight, prison house, hymn singing joy that comes from knowing the gospel, knowing the Lord, and knowing that we are fulfilling God's calling for our lives?

Fourth, I want us to notice, it was not the ease of Paul's life or his fame or his success that got the attention of the prisoners in that jail; it was the joy of Paul and Silas in the midst of injustice, cruelty, and suffering. It was how they responded in the midst of severe testing. Suffering is often the means by which God often uses in order to win others to himself. It was the suffering of Christ by which we were saved. And it will many times be through our own suffering and weakness that the power of the gospel will be manifested in our lives to others. Many prefer a self-centered, self-indulgent lifestyle to that of a faithful disciple but suffering for the sake of Christ and salvation are effectively inseparable realities.

Fifth, in light of the hardships that Paul and the brothers endured for the sake of Christ, we should ask ourselves if the Christianity that we believe and live out has enough saltiness to make a difference? Have we fallen into well-scrubbed worldliness instead of saltiness for Christ? Bearing the name of Christ will have an effect in our world. Paul wrote: "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ." (2 Corinthians 2:14–17, ESV) We must be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and His Gospel, to faithfully, honestly, and rightly live for Christ and to tell others Who Jesus is and what He has done to save sinners. And if those we tell choose to respond in hatred or ignore us, let us rejoice that the Gospel has been heard, thanking God for

the opportunity to be His witnesses. We cannot guarantee the response, but we must be faithful just the same.

Last, in light of the nature of the church that was founded in Philippi – could there possibly be a more dissimilar group economically, socially, racially and psychologically than Lydia and her household, the slave girl, the Philippian jailer and his household, and the prisoners -- let us be united in Christ. In this era of social disintegration, let us exhibit the unifying power of the gospel of Jesus Christ – no more cliquishness and no more divisions, but as Paul wrote to the Galatians, let us exemplify this truth: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27–28, ESV) Let that be our testimony in Christ.

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